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DROPOUT OF AMERICAN INDIANS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL.
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A CASE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS INVESTIGATED THE OGLALA SIOUX COMMUNITY. DATA GATHERED FROM A PREVIOUS STUDY WAS COMBINED WITH SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION DATA. INFORMATION WAS GATHERED ON SOCIAL SYSTEMS OF THE CLASSROOMS, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY, PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND PUPILS. RELATIVELY COMPLETE DATA WERE OBTAINED FOR 153 SIOUX YOUNG PEOPLE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 13 AND 21. INCLUDED IN THESE WERE 29 DROUPOUTS. THE RESULTS INDICATED THAT DROPOUT WAS HIGHLY CORRELATED WITH EXTREME POVERTY. THE PERSONALITY, INTELLIGENCE, AND GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL OF THE DROPOUTS DID NOT DIFFER FROM THOSE WHO REMAINED IN SCHOOL. (RS)

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DROPOUT OF AMERICAN INDIANS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

Cooperative Research Project No. S-099

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER | Page

I. INTRODUCTION 1

Population and Problem 1
Objectives 1
Related Research 1
Procedure 2

II. DROPOUT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS 4

Poverty and Dropout 4
Employment and Occupation 5
The Nuclear Family 6
Proficiency in English or Lakota 7
Gender and Age 7
General Conclusions 8

III. EIGHTH GRADE DROPOUTS 10

Attitudes Toward Elementary School 11
Attitude Toward Learning English 12
Why Didn't You Go To High School? 13
Comments by Robert V. Dumont, Research Assistant and Consultant 15

IV. THE COUNTRY INDIANS' PREPARATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL 16

The Teacher-Pupil Relationship 16
The Prospect of High School 19

V. THE YOUNG COUNTRY INDIAN MAN IN HIGH SCHOOL 20

Introductory 20
Ninth Grade Dropouts 21
Young Men with High School Experience 23
The Male Peer Culture 23
The World of Sport 24
Learning and the Teacher 25
Differences between Young Men (17 to 20) and Youths (14 to 16) 26

VI. THE YOUNG COUNTRY INDIAN WOMAN IN HIGH SCHOOL 28

General Characteristics of Country Indian High School Girls 28
New Entrants 28
Problems of the First Two Years 29
Invidious Distinction in Dress 30
"I Would Miss My Friends" 34
Hookey Playing 35

CHAPTER Page

VI. CONT'D

The Girls' Eye View of Scholastic Work 39
Concluding Comments 41

VII. THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF DROPPING OUT 43

Male Dropouts 43
Female Dropouts 45

FOOTNOTES 48

APPENDIX I - INDIAN EDUCATION FOR WHAT? 53

APPENDIX II - QUESTIONNAIRE SCHEDULE 59

TABLES

I. DROPOUT AND POVERTY . . . . Page 5
II. DROPOUT AND FAMILY EMPLOYMENT 5
III. EMPLOYMENT OF PARENTS OR GUARDIANS 6
IV. DROPOUT AND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY 6
V. DROPOUT AND LANGUAGE 7
VI. DROPOUT AND GENDER 8

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Population and Problem

The Oglala Community High School serves a total Indian population of some 9,000 persons. In 1960 some 771 of this population were between the ages of 15-18, and that year 30 pupils graduated from the high school. During the school year 1962-63 the high school had an enrollment of about 291 and a senior class of thirty-six.

The Oglala Sioux have had access to systems of public and private education for three generations. Moreover, most Sioux adults and adolescents assert that a high school diploma is essential to obtaining desirable employment. Nevertheless, educational achievement remains poor and the rate of drop out is very high. In recent years, only half of those who enter the primary grades remain to enter high school and of this relatively select group only a third graduate.

Objectives

The prime objective of this investigation was to analyze and describe the social situation and processes underlying this relatively poor scholastic achievement at the secondary level. Specifically, the analysis focused on the following questions:

To what degree is high school drop out related to socio-economic factors?

What are the attitudes and situation of young people who complete the eighth grade but do not enroll in high school?

What happens when young people of conservative or country Indian background enter the high school?

What are the major causes of dropout?

What motivates pupils to attend and graduate from high school?

To what degree are dropout and poor performance in the high school related to skills, values, and attitudes developed in the elementary schools?

Related Research

The related research as of 1962 was summarized and reviewed by ourselves in Chapter I of Formal Education in an American Indian Community.

More recent publications directly related to Indian education and dropout at the secondary level would include Charles K. Ray, Joan Ryan, and Seymour Parker, Alaskan Native Secondary School Dropouts: a research report. ("U. S. Office of Education, Cooperative Research Project," Number 878), University of Alaska. Also see Frank C. Miller and D. Douglas Caulkins, "Chippewa Adolescents: A Changing Generation," Human Organization, XXIII (1964), pp. 150-159; Paul Kutsche, "Cherokee High School Dropouts," Journal of American Indian Education, III, 2 (1964), pp. 22-30.

Procedure

The general design of this investigation follows from that of Formal Education in an American Indian Community[1] (CRP 1361), where formal and informal questionnaire schedules were designed and administered only after participant observation had provided considerable knowledge of the social systems of the classrooms, the schools, and the general community, and when the responses could then be interpreted within the context of that knowledge. Because of this procedure, questions and problems (both empirical and theoretical) could be formulated with a relatively clear understanding not only of the point of view of the specialist in education, but of the Indian parent, the pupils, and the teachers.

During the course of Cooperative Research Project 1361 we obtained interviews from half of the upper classmen and many of the lower classmen then resident at the high school. We also selected a random sample of young people born between the dates September 1, 1941, and August 31, 1949, from census lists for the area corresponding to the Loneman Day School. This yielded a sample of sixty-seven young people. Of these we interviewed all who were alive or on the reservation, namely forty-eight. We also drew a random sample of forty-two persons in the same age range from the population listed as residing in or near the town of Pine Ridge and obtained a sentence completion schedule from half of that number.

Semi-structured interviews were obtained from 153 Sioux young people between the ages of 13 and 21. Included in these are 29 dropouts, half of the upper classmen of the high school and many of the lower classmen. Questionnaire completion schedules were obtained from 49 young people of the same age group. Some 28 high school classes were observed and reported in detail. Personal interviews were obtained from 30 high school teachers, guidance personnel, and administrators. Semi-structured interviews were obtained from 31 persons known to be parents or guardians of young people between the ages of 13 and 21. Numerous observations and reports were made on high school assemblies, student meetings, and athletic events. An extensive written report on the Oglala High School was prepared by Robert V. Dumont, Research Assistant to the 1962-63 Oglala Sioux Education Project.

During the course of Cooperative Research Project S-099 (May 15, 1964 to November 15, 1964) additional data were obtained. Using a formal questionnaire, basic socio-economic and educational data were obtained on all of the young people who had graduated from a particular day school in June 1961, 1962, and 1963. This yielded a universe of forty-seven persons, twenty-four of whom had already dropped out of school and twenty-three of whom said they were planning to re-enroll in the high school. Most of these young people were interviewed and questioned about their educational experiences -- why they had not tried to enroll in the high school -- why they had enrolled but dropped out -- why they had enrolled and decided to stay. In marked contrast to their behavior of eighteen months ago, most respondents were extremely cooperative. When questioned about this change in attitude, some explained that they were now convinced that this type of investigation was intended to help them. Similar data -- formal questionnaires and some interviews -- were obtained from the thirty-five members of the high school graduating class of June 1963. Formal questionnaire completion schedules identical with those administered the year before were obtained from the universe of day school graduates and the universe of high school graduates. Some twenty additional informal interviews were obtained from other members of the community. While the questionnaires and interview schedules were composed by Rosalie Wax, all of the interviewing and administering of forms was done by local Indians trained during the research period 1962-63. (Samples of the formal questionnaires employed are attached as Appendix II.)

CHAPTER II

DROPOUT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Poverty and Dropout

We obtained a small range of basic socio-economic data on all of the forty-seven young people who had completed the eighth grade at the Loneman Day School in 1961, 1962, and 1963. Of these young people, twenty-three were still in school and twenty-four had dropped out. Ten had dropped out without enrolling in high school, ten during or after completing the ninth grade and four during the tenth grade. When these data were compared with achievement in school, the most notable finding was the marked association between extreme poverty and leaving school. This association would have been even more dramatic had we been able to include in our universe the (estimated ten or twelve) young people who had dropped out of school before completing the eighth grade.

The judgment as to the degree of poverty of the child's family was made by Mrs. Holy Rock, who has been a life-long resident of this local community and so was familiar with the economic situation of each of the small number of families involved.[2] Since our interest was in the effect of poverty on the life of the child in school, we instructed her to rate each family using the following three-point scale:

> PUT AN X IN THE SQUARE YOU THINK FITS THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT UP THIS YOUNG PERSON OR WHO ARE NOW RESPONSIBLE FOR HIM OR HER.
>
> ☐ They are quite well off and can afford to help the young person with money for clothes and other things needed for high school.
>
> ☐ They are not well off, but they can manage to help at least with some money for clothes and the things a young person needs for school.
>
> ☐ They are really having a hard time and they could hardly get any money at all to help the young person get clothes and things for school.

Judged by our field assistant according to this scale, the forty-seven families included 16 who were extremely poor, 27 who were poor, and 4 quite well off. It should be noted that four families listed as quite well off are those in which the father has a modest regular job with the Bureau (carpenter, road worker) or, in one case, is a Mixedblood rancher. Their standard of living is roughly analogous to that of the lower-middle class in general American society. In contrast, the sixteen families listed as extremely poor are involved in a daily struggle for the bare necessities of life.

Let us now tabulate this distribution against dropout.

TABLE I: DROPOUT AND POVERTY

	Level of Poverty			
	Extremely Poor	Moderately Poor	Quite Well Off	Total
	n=16	n=27	n=4	n=47
In School	2	18	3	23
Dropout	14	9	1	24

Employment and Occupation

When we inquired about employment, we found that families in which one parent was regularly employed seemed to have as much success in keeping their children in school as families in which parents and guardians had no employment whatever. *On the other hand, there was a higher* frequency of dropping out among the offspring of families where the father was employed irregularly - at odd jobs.

TABLE II: DROPOUT AND FAMILY EMPLOYMENT

	Level of Employment			
	Regular Employment	Odd Jobs	No Employment	Total
	n=14	n=16	n=17	n=47
In School	8	6	9	23
Dropout	6	10	8	24

Considerable light is thrown on this curious finding by the fact that all nine of the families with no employment but a child (or children) in high school are listed among those who are "poor." Conversely, eight of the sixteen families in which the father works at odd jobs or seasonal labor are listed among the "extremely poor." The fact is that the non-employed families are receiving ADC or pensions and the families who subsist on seasonal work and a little lease money usually are not. Since there is very little employment on the reservation for unskilled laborers, the families that receive ADC are relatively better off. Some of the latter also push their children into staying in school, because this makes a better impression on social workers. (One remarkable woman has reared five orphaned nieces and nephews on ADC, all of whom are now attending high school.)[3]

When parents or guardians have regular employment, those who have relatively skilled or higher status occupations tend to keep their children in school longer. Of 47 family heads, twenty had employment as follows:

TABLE III: EMPLOYMENT OF PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

In School

Ninth grade: 3 - Odd jobs
1 - Road department*
1 - Carpenter*
1 - Rancher
1 - Head of prison farm
1 - Secretary
1 - Ranch hand

Tenth grade: 1 - Road department*
1 - Dormitory matron*
1 - Ranch work

Eleventh grade: 1 - Rancher

Dropouts

Eighth grade: 2 - Odd jobs
1 - Ranch hand

Ninth grade: 2 - Laborer
1 - "Fish" factory (Wright-McGill plant)

Tenth grade: 1 - Bus driver*
1 - "Fish" factory
1 - Odd jobs

The Nuclear Family

There seems to be little relation between the number of parents (or parental surrogates) responsible for a child and school dropout. Of twenty-seven young people who come from "unbroken homes," fourteen are in high school and thirteen have left school.

TABLE IV: DROPOUT AND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

	Type of Guardianship			
	Both Parents	One Parent	Other Relative	Total
	n=27	n=11	n=9	n=47
In School	14	4	5	23
Dropout	13	7	4	24

---

*Bureau jobs are marked with asterisks.

On the other hand, intensive observation of the community suggests that the type or quality of care given an orphan or half-orphan is closely related to his performance in and attendance at day or high school. Most children who are shuffled about from one indifferent relative to another, do very poorly in school. Those brought up by one concerned parent, aunt, or grandparent often do very well. Aunts, in particular, seem to function well as foster parents. Traditionally their position is one of relative authority, whereas grandparents are expected to be indulgent.

Proficiency in English or Lakota

Proficiency in English is essential to scholastic and academic achievement. Some investigators also hold the converse opinion: that proficiency in his native tongue handicaps the Indian child. Be this as it may, the particular universe here investigated suggests that fluency in the English language is no guarantee of high school graduation. Of twenty-eight individuals who spoke English reasonably well, thirteen dropped out and fifteen are still in school. On the other hand, proficiency in Lakota does not necessarily lead to dropout. Of the thirty-eight students who speak Lakota well, sixteen are still in school. (About one-third of the young people who graduate from OCHS speak Lakota well.) Eighteen students are proficient in both languages; of these nine had dropped out and nine were still in school. Four students who left grade school with virtually no competence in spoken English did not enroll in high school.

These figures are to some degree affected by the fact that students who enter the high school speaking little English usually develop considerable fluency if they remain there one or two years. (This condition affects about half of the individuals in this universe.)

TABLE V: DROPOUT AND LANGUAGE

	Linguistic Proficiency*		
	Speak English well	Speak Lakota well	Speak both languages wel
	n=28	n=38	n=18
In School	15	16	9
Dropout	13	22	9

Gender and Age

On the eighth and ninth grade level young men tend to terminate their formal education earlier than girls.

---

[*] As the categories are not exclusive, figures will not total 47 (100%).

TABLE VI: DROPOUT AND GENDER

	Gender Male n=23	 Female n=24	 Total n=47
In School	10	13	23
Dropout	13	11	24

Of the thirteen male dropouts, seven left after graduation from day school; while of the eleven female dropouts only three left at that point before enrolling in high school. Although this difference might well receive further investigation, we would suggest that the young men, aged sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen, are more independent, impatient, and, at the same time, more bashful and sensitive than the young women. If they do not wish to go to school their parents usually cannot or will not force them to go. Girls seem to be more attracted by the glamour of the high school's social activities; they are also more dependent on their parents and easier to coax or force into enrollment. In any case, there are more country Indian girls in the ninth and tenth grades than there are boys. In our universe there were thirteen girls and only ten boys. On the other hand, so many girls drop out in the tenth and eleventh grades that male high school graduates outnumber female graduates.

As might be expected, there is some correlation between dropping out and being two or three years overage for a grade. Nevertheless, many country Indians enrolled in the high school are two or three years overage and two-thirds of those who graduate are overage.

General Conclusions

Sixteen of the families in this universe were categorized as extremely poor even by country Indian standards. Children from such families have almost no chance of finishing high school; about half of them do not even try to enroll.[4] "Moderately poor" families in which some adult is regularly employed or gets a regular income from Aid to Dependent Children or an old age pension have a lower rate of drop out for their children than families where the father works only at odd jobs or seasonal employment. (Country Indians speak of ADC as "regular employment.") The qualitative relationship that a child has with parents or guardians is more important than the quantitative. Young people who speak scarcely any English rarely enroll in high school; on the other hand, proficiency in the English language is no guarantee of high school graduation. Most important of all, perhaps, is the phenomenon not shown in this structured questionnaire, that the majority of country Indian day school students learn to speak English moderately well if they do attend the high school for any length of time.

* * * * * * *

Before going to press we learned that two of the young people in this sample who were listed as dropouts have returned to high school. One is male and one female; one comes from an extremely poor family and one from a family that is moderately poor. The boy has only his father, but the girl has both parents. Both of the young people speak English well and the girl is also fluent in Lakota. The girl is re-entering the tenth grade, while the boy is enrolling in the high school for the first time.

CHAPTER III

EIGHTH GRADE DROPOUTS

Roughly twenty percent of the country Indians who have recently completed eighth grade in a day school do not enroll in high school.[5] Without exception, these young people were reared under the kind of circumstances which even reservation inhabitants define as extreme poverty. They live in the most isolated areas - miles from even a graded road. None spoke or speak English at home, and most have passed their day school years as the "real quiet," "backward," grubby children of "folks who were real hard up." Some have never worn a new or "store-bought" garment. Nine, ten, or eleven years at day school have enabled these youths to read and write English and to (passively) understand it at about the level of comprehension of a ten-year-old. But, like Non-Indian high school or college students who have been taught French or German by the old "classic" method, they cannot speak their second language. Some cannot even converse fluently in the local Pine Ridge dialect of English.

Of ten girls interviewed, seven are married and five have babies, though marriages and babies do not always coincide. One girl, after sordid experiences in Rapid City, is "keeping house" for a White Man of fifty. Wed or unwed, most of these young matrons seem to lead more sedate lives than their peers of country Indian background now at Boarding School; and in so doing they conform to the general Sioux notion that bearing children tends to settle a girl down. These young women live with either their husband or kin and are preoccupied with washing, cleaning, cooking, watching the babies, or, if they have the skill, sewing.

More young men than young women drop out of school after completing the eighth grade. None of those from whom we obtained interviews is married. Some live with their folks in isolated homesteads and are so shy that they will not talk even to fellow "Fullbloods." Others have lost one or both parents and tend to roam over the reservation, visiting relatives who will take them in. Often, two such fellows become fast friends, even though they do not usually stay at the same household. When not playing ball or talking about the things young fellows talk about, they may tinker with some relative's car, carry water, or haul and chop wood. Though not arduous, this existence is by no means idle, for there are many irregular chores at an isolated homestead requiring the strength of a young man. Should these young fellows get an odd job and lay hands on a little cash, they may (like many of their age mates in high school) pick up some girls, buy several six-packs of beer, and take off in a car on a roaming binge during which they usually cover a great deal of territory. The orgy ends when the beer, gas, and cash give out - usually three to five days. As one explained: "It's all right if you get drunk, if you don't bother no one and stay out in the country some place."

Our first encounters with these young people were depressing and exasperating. To begin with, they were very difficult to find, since so many of them shifted residence from one remote household to another. Questions that we considered friendly and unchallenging (e.g., "Was there anything about school that you didn't like?" "What does a good teacher do?") were received with silence and an averted face, a mumbled "don't know," or what appeared to be a hostile glare. Fullblood staff members from their own community were not able to elicit much more information. In time, we learned that like many adolescents, these young people spoke openly only to their pals or to certain relatives whom they were sure would understand them. They differed from their less isolated and more sophisticated Indian peers in that the range of persons they identified as pals or as "people you could talk to" was extremely small. Most, however, were willing to communicate with us in writing - by a fill-in questionnaire - and some eventually spoke about their experiences and attitudes to Indian members of our study whom they identified as understanding persons.

Attitudes Toward Elementary School

Most of the young people who terminated their education before or immediately after the eighth grade do not seem to have disliked either the scholastic or the social aspects of school. Several insisted that they "learned a lot of things;" almost all remarked upon the value of learning to "talk English;" a few of the young women spoke with warmth about instruction in cooking or sewing. Two girls pointed out that they had been awarded perfect attendance certificates: as one explained, "The only good meals I had was in school so I wouldn't never miss a day;" while the other commented, "What I hate most is winter because I had to walk to school (three miles each way). I had to get to school because I didn't want to miss any day."

When asked whether they could recall anything at all about school that they did not like, about half of the young people either were too shy to complain or genuinely believed that their school days had been as pleasant as could be expected. But some of the young women recalled how anxious and embarrassed they had become when unable to keep up with scholastic subject matter:

> My teacher thought I was too dumb to understand. If I ask a question - I felt dumb. If I asked another question - I'd feel dumber. If I got stuck on some questions, I'd want to ask, but the other kids would laugh at me.
>
> * * * * * * * * *
>
> I hated to keep asking the teacher and I try to learn by myself. I hated to ask her over and over.
>
> * * * * * * * * *
>
> When I finally quit I wanted to quit because I couldn't understand some things.

Other unpleasant memories of elementary school days involve being teased for wearing old clothing, getting bored from sitting still for hours on end, and getting into fights with "tale-teller" girls:

> I always wished I could dress like some of the other kids. One year I just had one dress and I had to keep washing it till it was real faded.
>
> * * * * * * * * *

> [The worst thing about school] is when a person gets mad at you. They would tell the teachers lies and you get the worst of it. (From Fill-in Q)

When discussing the education of their own children, a number of the young mothers spontaneously mentioned the "fooling around" and "eraser throwing" which (as they see it) is permitted in the federal day schools. Their ideal is to send their children to day school for the first three or four years and then to the Holy Rosary Mission. They anticipate that the more rigorous discipline characteristic of the Catholic Mission will keep fighting, stealing, and general disorder in check. None of these young people, male or female, seems to have an inkling of the extent to which they and their peers determined what went on when they attended the higher elementary grades.[6] The paralyzing atmosphere of silence and assumed stupidity so apparent to an outside observer seems to be a part of their definition of the natural classroom situation.

Attitude Toward Learning English

As we have remarked, most of these young people would or could not converse in English either to White or to Sioux members of the research staff. Many, however, were willing to write answers to English questions. Clearly, they were under the correct impression that they wrote far better than they spoke. Even so, in most cases, their written English was ungrammatical and misspelled: A young man of twenty wrote, "The hardes things for me in school is hissroy and spelling and the rest is easy for me."

> Question: In what ways were things hard for you?
> Answer: The ways of these things was hard is they are so hard I cant do them.

Many assured us that they could "understand" English far better than they could "talk" it. This, of course, is generally true for persons who have learned a language by the method which emphasizes grammar and composition rather than conversation.

Since so many of these young people complained that "teachers did not explain," (which, we found, meant that the students were not able to make sense of her first or second explanation) we included a number of questions about instruction in Lakota in our schedule. Somewhat to our surprise, we found a correlation between incompetence in English and insistence that the teachers give instruction in English. Indeed, if there was one point on which these young country Indian dropouts felt strongly, it was that the most valuable thing to be learned at school was "talking English."

> I'd rather speak english (sic) than Indian because people now-a-days speak more english.

* * * * * * * * * *

> I feel like I missed out something in school. I understand English but I can't talk it and I'd like to learn to talk it.

* * * * * * * * * *

> First young man: I want to talk English because of modern life.
> Second young man: And girls.
>
> * * * * * * * * * *
>
> (Fill in:) When I talk to white men: "I feel losted, cause I would sometimes get my word mixed up.
>
> * * * * * * * * * *
>
> I still can't talk to White People. I get bashful and shy and I think they'll laught at me. When they talk to me, all I can say is Yes and No.

But that their inability to "talk" English had had an adverse effect on their scholastic progress they did not seem to be aware. A retarded sixth grader, fourteen years old, was more perceptive:

> I have a hard time with my English. I don't read good. Some kids could read good and some don't. The ones that speak English could read better. But the ones that don't speak English--well--they sure have a hard time with their reading too.

These respondents seem convinced that fluency in spoken English is a *sine qua non* to the goods and rewards of modern society. Without this knowledge, their chances of gainful employment are nil. Many also feel that their failure to "learn to talk" English in school is an indication of their own lack of competence or intelligence.

Why Didn't You Go To High School?

When interviewed by persons they defined as outsiders, these young people were particularly reticent about discussing their reasons for making no attempt to enroll in the ninth grade. When asked whether White people made them nervous or afraid they said, "No." Some, especially young men, asserted that they had no scholastic difficulties whatever - even though they might have failed two grades or received several "social promotions." Others admitted that they had some trouble with "reading" or "language," but implied that this did not distress them very much: "The easy thing to do (in school) is wait for the races (recess) to come and the hardes things to do is when the teacher tells us to studin some school work."

But when they were approached by a member of their own community, many discussed their reasons for "quitting school" in quite different fashion. Some pointed out that their folks were so poor that they could not obtain even the minimum of clothing necessary for high school:

> My mother died two years ago. And last year I lost my father. We're so hard up I had to quit school. I'm staying with my [older] sister, but she's got too many kids of her own. And I don't want to bother her (for money) because she's having a hard time herself.
>
> * * * * * * * * * *

> My dad gets a check because he got into an accident at the saw mill and cut his arm off. So he's just got one arm. But there's about ten of us living here. There's lot of boys and two of them are married and they got wives and some kids. My brothers don't work so my Dad has to support all of us.
>
> * * * * * * * * * *
>
> When I was at day school I used to work summers putting up hay and things like that. And I bought myself two new overalls, and two pair of shoes and that kept me through the whole year. At day school it doesn't matter what you wear. But at high school - I've been told that I have to take some certain things that (stammers) they're really hard to get for me. My Dad don't work and it's really hard for us because there's about eight kids.
> (All three statements translated from Lakota by interviewer.)

Others added that they know they are dumb because "they barely made it through eighth grade." And even if they were not dumb, they said, they are bashful and afraid of White people. Some of the young men brought up at the most isolated homesteads seemed genuinely terrified by the idea of going to high school and associating with strangers. Statements like the following were made by tall, powerful youths who, our Sioux interviewer reported, "were scared to talk to me and hardly looked at me." The first statement was made by a young man who dropped out after completing the eighth grade; the second by a young man who attended the ninth grade for a few months:

> I liked school and all that ... but my grades are really bad. I just can't learn. If I'm a little bit smarter, maybe I could go on, but I'm too dumb. And then besides I'm too shy. I know I'll really get pushed around once I go to high school. I can't speak up for myself and I can't talk to White people. I get scared when I see them. I don't want to go to OCHS or any other school ... I'm too bashful.
> (Translated from Lakota by interviewer.)
>
> * * * * * * * * * *
>
> At day school it was kind of easy for me. But high school was really hard, and I can't figure out even simple questions that they ask me ... Besides I'm so quiet [modest and unaggressive] that the boys really took advantage of me. They borrow money from me every Sunday night and they don't even care to pay it back ... I can't talk English very good, and I'm really bashful and shy, and I get scared when I talk to White people. I usually just stay quiet in the [day school] classroom, and the teachers will leave me alone. But at boarding school they wanted me to get up and talk or say something ... I quit and I never went back ... I can't seem to get along with different people, but I'm so shy I can't even make friends ... My folks wanted me to go on relocation. But I'm scared to go any place. I'd rather stay here.
> (Translated from Lakota by interviewer.)

Comments by Robert V. Dumont, Research Assistant and Consultant

Robert Dumont has suggested that there seem to be two causal lines leading to the case of the "non-attempter." One may be traced to his home, as the "non-attempter" or his family are often deviants and isolates within the Indian community. Another leads to the structure of the classroom, where the "non-attempter" is often the scapegoat - "the boy or girl who everybody picks on." Dumont correctly emphasizes that "non-attempters" are an aggregate rather than a group and that most of them play hookey or quit school to get away from their peers. They are products of the current day school situation, the complex teacher-student-peer-school-community attitudes which can turn the classroom into a torture chamber for the child who does not fit.

CHAPTER IV

THE COUNTRY INDIANS' PREPARATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL

The Teacher-Pupil Relationship

By the time country Indian pupils reach the eighth grade, they have developed certain strong and fairly rigid definitions of the school situation, the learning process, and the pupil-teacher relationship. Though they will invariably tell an inquiring White person that "school is where you go to learn," their immediate and daily interest in attending class is life with their peers - the talk, play, intrigue, courtship, competition, and self-disciplined loyalty that combine to create the vigorous and passionate society of the country Indian adolescent. Other human beings - and especially the teachers - are excluded from this little world, and numerous peer group activities are carried on in the classroom without either the teacher being aware of them or, it might be added, without any serious interference with the process of formal learning. Whatever else they may be, these activities and relationships are the most significant and precious things the young Sioux possess. When a young person in these grades plays truant, it is rarely because he dislikes a teacher or finds classwork a bore. Rather, it is because he (or more often she) is involved in a bitter feud or an amorous affair. If the former, the young person will return to school when she is sure she will not be ambushed and beaten. If the latter, she will return also, to be greeted by the meaningful glances and gossip which (if the young man is particularly handsome) conceal envy.

On the other hand, when Indian elders or pupils assert that school is "where you learn" this is in almost all cases an honest statement of fact as they see it. For the school has taught the country Indian to define scholastic or White peoples' learning in terms resembling those used in many primary or unskilled work groups and he defines the Bureau teacher's role as that of a competent foreman. According to this perspective the teacher's prime obligation is to show students how to do a particular task and oversee them as they work on it. If the task is complicated the good teacher "explains everything we're supposed to do ... so we could understand." He is, moreover, like a good foreman, explicit, fair, and reasonable in his assignments, "he gives you something to do." Meanwhile he keeps restless or high-spirited pupils from "teasing and fooling around" while class work is in progress. If some one falls behind or "does not understand," the good teacher "helps him so that he could keep up." Again, like a good foreman, he is fair, "he doesn't have favorites." In addition to his abilities as an overseer, a teacher who hopes to retain the respect and working cooperation of his class must refrain from embarrassing a pupil before his peer group and from ridiculing or "poking fun at" conservative Indian ways or Indians in general. Given the extreme sensitivity of the Sioux and the White teachers' relative ignorance of Indian etiquette and sanctions, this is very difficult to do. Nevertheless, many young Sioux feel that "If a teacher is OK you do the right thing." This is to say, you work conscientiously on assignments and do not "raise cain" in the classroom. If, as occasionally happens, a pupil "really respects" a teacher, he "really listens ... whatever he tells me, I do. I never talk back." By and large, the teacher who is "OK" will usually have an orderly and fairly cooperative class, bearing - in its quiet industriousness, its relationship of formality and reserve between instructor and student, and its lack of intellectual activity, critical discussion, curiosity, insight, or inventiveness - a striking resemblance to a well appointed factory where silent workers are engaged in relatively simple piecework.

A teacher who does not conform to this definition of his role, who, for example, attempts to initiate discussion, lectures too much, tries to enforce humiliating regulations, or, worst of all, offends the peer group, will find his lot hard indeed.[8] His words seem to fall without trace into a bottomless pit of inattentive silence. If he calls a pupil by name, the pupil refuses to meet his eyes. Week after week and month after month the teacher is treated, insofar as is possible, as if he did not exist. Students who do wish to learn or to ask the teacher for instruction (and there are some even in the most alienated of classes) will not dare to speak out in class, as the peer group defines even a curt question as "sucking ass" and the offender would immediately be subjected to ridicule. If this teacher is determined and energetic, he may still carry on some work-group oriented instruction, though on a very low and slow level. He doggedly gives assignments on which the more earnest pupils soberly and silently work while he patrols the aisles, giving individual instruction, *sotto voce*, to those who raise a hand for assistance. Meanwhile, other pupils in the class are day-dreaming, reading library or comic books, or covertly carrying on peer group activities.

If, then, the country Indian who plans to attend high school has been a member of a "better" day school classroom, he has usually come to define "school learning" in terms of a conscientious assembly line worker. Whereas, if he comes from a "poor" class, he has come to see school primarily as a place where he and his peers can carry on their own activities, thereby "raising cain," and so he defines formal learning as a condescending selection or surreptitious appropriation of the relatively few White peoples' skills or facts which, to him, seem attractive or valuable. In either case he tends to exclude from the teacher-pupil relationship any implication of reciprocity, receptivity, acceptance, or common humanity. We have rarely heard pupils and teacher laughing together in any Bureau classroom.

In attempting to make these attitudes clear to members of our staff, one young man explained: "I just don't care to learn some of the things going on in class." A young woman told us: "If somebody don't want to learn, well, they don't have to listen to the teacher or respect her." To the person who regards adolescent Sioux as children who ought to comply unquestioningly with all the demands made upon them by their teachers, these comments may seem intolerably insolent. Others may interpret them as reflecting an admirable sense of personal integrity and a defense of freedom of choice. But to many country Indians they are neither aggressive nor defensive; they are a plain statement of how they feel about lessons and teachers.

It should be emphasized that the phenomena being discussed here relate to the day school student's attitude toward most of his teachers and his lessons in the Bureau day schools. They are not characteristic of his attitude toward instruction or education in general. When, for example, a group of students from the Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges taught summer school in a local Indian meeting house with Indian assistants and staff workers, the pupils exhibited virtually none of the assembly line traits we observed in the classrooms and, most amazing of all, they were not bashful or withdrawn with their teachers. When the surprised Mr. Dumont discussed these differences with an elder of the local community, he was quietly informed: "Those kids, they're used to those places."[9] Significantly, however, these same children would not respond to the conversational overtures of strangers--White visitors to their summer school. It seems likely that the Sioux are capable of learning in many different ways and situations and that the behavior we observed in the classrooms during the course of Cooperative Research Project 1361[*] was not "Sioux learning" but a specific Sioux response to a specific situation.[10]

The disposition to withdraw into an aloof silence in the presence of a White teacher or professional person is so common among Indians that it merits more discussion. We ourselves "conducted" interviews with seventh and eighth graders in which we were unable to elicit a single word either in English or Lakota. When we commented on this phenomenon to Indian elders we were told with a deprecating smile that all Indian young people were shy and bashful. This is true - within limits.[11] But since we were living in the community we soon observed that the decorous shyness displayed before elders differed markedly from that used to keep teachers or other White persons at a distance. When an Indian elder told a young person to do something daring or embarrassing, the latter often behaved as if he were reluctant or bashful; yet, with a bit of nudging from other elders or peers he usually did as he was told. When a White person, teacher, counsellor, interviewer, or tourist, made a similar request, he was often greeted with an assumption of paralyzed incomprehension and incompetence.

After we had lived in the community many months most of the children who lived nearby had become the opposite of shy and our efforts now had to be directed to keeping them out of our hair. As a result of these experiences we concluded that Sioux children and adolescents are "bashful" or withdrawn before strange persons and in strange situations - whether these involve White, Indians, or other people. When the strangeness is dissipated they may become very talkative and ebullient.[12] Or, to put it their way, in any familiar and unthreatening situation they are not bashful or "quiet." On the other hand, when adolescent Sioux students dislike, despise, or fear a particular Bureau teacher, they often give him what Indians call "the silent treatment" for months on end. This is not an expression of "apathy" but a manifestation of the strength of the peer group.

We have discussed this so-called bashfulness in some detail because it is almost always misinterpreted by White people and, in consequence, tends to handicap the young Indian entering high school or seeking scholastic assistance or work off the reservation. In high school he will be competing with White pupils, most of whom are highly skilled in the verbal manipulation of their teachers. As compared to them, the silent country Indian appears incompetent and stupid. Thus, while his withdrawal from strangers may protect him from prying or ill-intentioned persons, it also serves to isolate the young Sioux from those who are willing to assist him with scholastic help, expert counsel, or money.[13]

The Prospect of High School

Leaving the familiar social situation of the day school for life in a distant boarding school is a prospect both frightening and fascinating. To many of these young country folk (and to their elders) the Agency Town of Pine Ridge is a center of sophistication: there are blocks of "Bureau" homes with lawns and fences, a barber shop, big grocery stores, churches, gas-stations, a drive-in, and even a restaurant with a juke box. While older siblings or cousins may have reported that at high school "they make you study harder," that "they just make you move every minute," that dormitory regulations are irritating, or that the Mixedblood pupils are "mean" or "snotty," there are the compensatory attractions of new populations of girls and boys, high school movies, basketball games, and the social (White man's) dances that highlight the school year. For the young men there is the chance to play high school basketball, baseball, or football; for the young women there is the increased distance from overwatchful conservative parents; for both, there will be the opportunity to hitchhike or refuse to hitchhike to White Clay, with its beer joints, bowling hall, and archaic aura of Western wickedness.

Young country Indians who were "picked on" by the children in day school or who "run with" a clique whose members do not wish to go to high school are not likely to enroll. But if at least some of their close friends or relatives go, they will prefer to share in the adventure rather than remain at home and face the relatively circumscribed life of the young people "who live on their folks."

> It seems like everytime I go home there's nothing to do out to Oglala. Kinda dead around there. The only thing I do when I go home is play around with my little brother. I wish there was something to do.

If they go to boarding school their folks will not have to feed them. Besides, as some parent or elder may remind them, getting a high school diploma is today the only way one can get a good job.

CHAPTER V

THE YOUNG COUNTRY INDIAN MAN IN HIGH SCHOOL

Introductory

During the academic year 1962-63 the Oglala Community High School (OCHS) had a total enrollment of about 293. Class enrollment was as follows: ninth grade, 116; tenth grade, 93; eleventh grade, 48; twelfth grade, 36.[14] The total elementary school enrollment at that time was about 1,700 and the total reservation population about 9,000.

The high school student body is remarkably heterogeneous, ranging from the children of well-paid government employees to the children of residents much of whose existence has been hand to mouth. There are pupils from the families living in the agency town of Pine Ridge: White or Mixedblood Bureau officials of high, medium, and low rank, tribal officers, gas station owners, Public Health workers, store keepers, people who work in the "Fish" factory or on the Housing Project, people who are unemployed or receive ADC. All of these folk are town dwellers and their children have attended the Oglala Community (elementary) School (OCS) as day scholars. Despite many obvious differences in economic and social status these young people enter the high school with a broad common background of experience in the same elementary school.

Another significant aggregate of high school pupils are the experienced "boarders," the children who have attended OCS with the town-dwelling day scholars but have lived, eaten and slept in the dormitories. Like the town day scholars, the boarders vary greatly in family status. A handful might be called the "boarding school elite," and these are almost always the children of high ranking Bureau employees, Mixedbloods and Whites, who, as one college trained Indian put it, "superficially control the school by controlling most of the 'activities' approved of and sponsored by the school." Some boarders are orphans or children who have been abandoned by their parents. Others come from isolated areas on the reservation not served by any day school and some are sent to the boarding school by concerned parents who are too poor to feed their children during the winter. Still others come from distant reservations. Yet altogether, these boarders share a common covert culture and society far more formidable than the town-dwelling day scholars, for they have passed the greater part of their lives in an institution and have learned to live according to norms as powerful (though different from) those that govern the behavior of the country day school students.

The third and largest aggregate is composed of "country Indians," the young people who have lived "out on the reservation" all of their lives and have attended one of six day schools. While the parents of these young folk range from moderately well off (rancher, school bus driver) to extremely poor, most of them are poor, either by Indian or White standards. They come to the high school in small clusters of six to ten, that is, with those members of their eighth grade class who want to go to high school.

The high school is located at the extreme western edge of the Agency town of Pine Ridge - as far away from the center of the reservation as possible. To reach it, country Indian students travel anywhere from ten to a hundred and fifty miles, first on a dirt road and then on the paved highway. On this journey they will pass the Catholic Mission school and - after another five miles - the hospital. A mile more and they reach the outskirts of Pine Ridge and pass a bleak looking housing development, the police station and tribal court, the "Fish" factory and the ramshackle frame dwellings and trailers in which many of the town dwelling Indians live. Reaching the major crossroad they may turn left to the modest business section - grocery and general stores, a drug store, several churches, a small restaurant, a laundromat, more gas stations and finally, a frozen custard stand. But if they are going to the high school they turn right down a street lined with the relatively large, neatly painted and fenced houses occupied by Bureau employees, past the tribal office and the Bureau offices, past a stretch of open land, across a creek, and finally they reach the imposing cluster of school buildings, dormitories, and the houses of teachers and other school employees.

If the potential high school student did not turn either to right or left he would, after four miles, reach White Clay - a tiny hamlet with more stores and several beer joints.

Ninth Grade Dropouts

Some thirty-five percent of country Indian boys who enroll in the Bureau high school leave during the ninth grade and of these most drop out during the first few months. These early dropouts are the most taciturn of all the young Sioux of high school age. Some refused to answer any of our questions, even when they were encouraged to respond by older relatives who understood the object of our study. On several occasions parents explained to Indian staff members that their sons had not told them why they left school.[15]

When we became better acquainted with these youths and with the general country Indian community we perceived that this taciturnity could be considered as maintaining the mores of the day school peer group that restrict communication with anyone who might be identified as a school authority. We also learned that many of the boys had an additional and more immediate reason for their silence: they had run away from school either because they had been punished for an infraction of the rules or because they expected to be.

> The kids raise cain too much in school. When they get themselves scolded, they run away. I kept getting drunk, so I guess that's what made me quit. But I never did want to quit.[16]

Some of the fun, excitement, and reckless sense of adventure involved in "raising cain" is reflected in the verbal account of a bright youth of 15 who had run away from the high school. He speaks English much more fluently than most country Indian youths.[17] Shortly after entering the ninth grade, he and his friends had appropriated a car. (The usual pattern in such escapades is to drive off the reservation until the gas gives out.) For this offense (according to the respondent) he and his friends had been restricted for the rest of the term, that is, they were forbidden to leave the high school campus or attend any of the school recreational affairs, games, dances, or movies.[18] Even then, he seems to have kept up with his class work and he did not play hookey except in reading class: "It was after we stole that car. Mrs. Bluger [pseudonym for reading teacher] would keep asking who stole the car in class. So I just quit going there." Then:

> One night we were the only ones up in the older boys' dorm. We said "Hell with this noise. We're not going to be the only ones here."
>
> So we snuck out and went over to the dining hall. I pried this one window open about this far and then it started to crack, so I let it go . . . We heard someone so we took off. It was show that night I think. [Motion picture was being shown in school auditorium.]
>
> All the rest of the guys was sneaking in and getting something. So I said I was going to get my share too. We had a case of apples and a case of oranges. Then I think it was the night watchman was coming, so we run around and hid behind those steps. He shined that light on us. So I thought right then I was going to keep on going.
>
> That was around Christmas time. We walked back to Oglala [about 15 miles] and we were eating this stuff all the way back.
>
> [Interviewer:] You took those two cases?
> [Respondent:] Naw. We just took what we could carry in our coats.

This youth asserted that he would like to go back to high school - but not to the Bureau school. "I'd like to finish (high school) and get a good job some place. If I don't I'll probably just be a bum around here or something."

Another youth told a similar story:

> Int: What year did you go to high school?
> Res: I quit three years ago after they kick me out of school.
> Int: What happened?

Res: I and two other boys stole a government car and went to White Clay, Rushville, Gordon, and back.
Int: What kind of car?
Res: It was a 1948 model.
Int: How come you are involved with these two other boys?
Res: I don't know. We just decided to steal the car and the other guy said (suggested) it.
Int: Then they kicked you out of school?
Res: No. They weren't going to kick me out, but the week before that, we broke into the bowling alley and took five boxes of candy.
Int: Why did you do that?
Res: I don't know.
Int: Are you willing to go back to school?
Res: I don't know. Since they kicked me out, they probably won't want me back.[19]
(Translated from Lakota by interviewer.)

So far as we were able to determine, a few weeks or months attendance at high school had not in any way changed the attitudes of these youths toward their teachers and the learning situation. High school, in their words, was "all right," and the notion that they might "really like" or "really dislike" a particular subject was alien to them. Teachers were still judged by the rules of the day school, though the bright youth whose adventures are related above added a nuance:

> I have had a lot of good teachers. They help you or they give you something to do to keep you interested. They try to keep you from getting bored or things like that.

Young Men with High School Experience

We obtained excellent and sometimes repeated interviews and fill-in schedules from the majority of country Indian males in the eleventh and twelfth grades and from most of the young men who dropped out in the eleventh and twelfth grades. When we analyzed and compared these data with that taken from ninth grade dropouts and eighth graders, we were struck by the similarity in attitudes. To put it more explicitly, young men who have reached the pinnacle of the eleventh and twelfth grade take much the same cavalier attitude toward breaking the school regulations as do the ninth graders who run away from school never to return. Moreover, their years of experience in high school do not seem to alter their definitions of learning and the role of the teacher in any significant way. While there are differences between older dropouts and non-dropouts and between the older young men and the youths of fourteen or fifteen, these young people are, in most respects, far more alike than unalike.

The Male Peer Culture

All but one of our older male respondents, whether students or dropouts, assured our male interviewers that they were well acquainted with hookey playing, surreptitious beer parties, food and car stealing, and the other enjoyments outlawed by the school authorities. Relying on these verbal accounts, we do not know whether, for example, star athletes actually disobey the school regulations as frequently and flagrantly as they claim. But that all Sioux young men between the ages of 12 and 20 (and older) wish to be regarded as hellions who seize every chance to play pranks on the school authorities there can be no doubt at all. To hold any other attitude would be unmanly. The narration of picaresque tales of personal adventure or escapade is one of the major activities pursued when a group of young men gets hold of a couple of six-packs and sneaks out to the creek to booze it up.

An eleventh grader in good standing explained his private device for playing hookey and added proudly: "They never caught me yet!" A twelfth grader and first string basketball player told how he and some other students "stole" a jeep from the high school machine shop and drove it all over town. When asked why he did this, he patiently explained: "To see if we can get away with it. It's for the enjoyment . . . to see if we can take the car without getting caught." Another senior basketball player assured our male staff worker: "you can always get out and booze it up." Still another senior and outstanding athlete remarked:

> Once a whole bunch of us were restricted - all the guys who work in the bathroom. I didn't care so I took off, went to Holy Rosary homecoming, to White Clay, and then to a dance over to Kyle. But I didn't get slicked. Other times when I try to sneak around, then I get slicked.

The impulse to boast of one's virile achievements at male festive occasions seems to maintain itself into middle and even into old age. Even country Indians with college training zestfully told ~~(male)~~ members of the study how they and a group of proctors had stolen large amounts of food from the high school kitchen and were never apprehended, or how they and their friends drank three fifths of whiskey in one night and did not pass out.

Like the Smoker Room Stories of the Gay Nineties, these tales are usually narrated only before other males. To tell them before mixed groups containing persons one should respect is, perhaps, not seemly. Thus, the responses to the following questionnaire are atypical, for though his peers might share the respondent's sentiments, they would not usually express them outside of their masculine society:[20]

> The nicest thing about school: IS WOMEN.
> When I feel like playing hookey: I GO.
> Most teachers: ARE FULL OF SHIT.
> When I am thirty years old: I'LL KICK OFF.

The World of Sport

Closely related though not identical with this world of youthful daring, excitement, and "agonistic"[21] play, is the country Indian youth's interest in sports. "I like to play basketball," is one of the most frequent responses of young men to the question: "What do you like most about school." Indeed, several ninth and tenth graders confessed that the opportunity to play basketball was the main reason they kept going to school and one eighth grader who had run away from school several times as a juvenile stated:

> When I was in the seventh grade I made the B team on the basketball squad. And I made the A team when I was in the eighth grade. So I stayed and finished school without running away anymore.

The unselfconscious devotion and ardor with which many of these young men participate in sports must be witnessed to be even mildly appreciated. They cannot communicate their joy and pride in words, though one seventeen year old member of the team that won the state championship tried, by telling how a team member wearing a war bonnet "led us onto the playing floor and this really gave them a cheer." This young man also remarked that he might not "make the team" this, his senior, year, because (according to him) more than seventy of the boys were trying out for it, a figure which would be roughly forty percent of the male population of the high school.

Learning and the Teacher

As we remarked at the beginning of this section, we found no significant differences between dropouts and non-dropouts with regard to their expressed attitudes toward the learning process or the teacher-pupil relationship. Moreover, the pupils' attitude toward learning or the teacher does not seem to change much as they proceed from the ninth to the twelfth grades. Eleventh and twelfth graders say more about their teachers and their classwork, but the meaning of what they say is the same:

Eighth Graders: A good teacher is one who helps the kids with their lessons.

* * * * * * * * * * *

A good teacher is one who trys to help in everything we do and explains what she is saying.

Tenth Grade Dropout: A good teacher is fair about the whole deal . . . If you do what he tells you, everything is OK. He never shames you or hurts your feelings.

Eleventh Grade Dropout: A good teacher is one who takes his time to explain clearly, what a student would like to know, also who is strict about homework.

Twelfth Grade Dropout: A good teacher is one who helps the kids with their assignment.

Twelfth Graders: A good teacher is hard on students to get their work done.

* * * * * * * * * * *

A good teacher always keeps us busy. He helps explain the things I don't understand.

Taciturn eighth and ninth graders will often simply tune out a teacher who "talks" (lectures). Eleventh and twelfth graders criticize such teachers and speak with favor of those "who keep us busy." "I don't learn much from Mr. James because he is talking about his [pet interest] most of the time. But when he is teaching - showing us how to [do the assignment] - I'm learning a lot."

As some might not expect, most of the country Indians who survive the first two years of high school dislike teachers who "let the kids raise cain and run away with the class." Their ideal is the hard-minded, efficient instructor who is "hard on students to get their work done." Most of the young men on this age level (whether attending school or dropped out) named as the "teacher they liked most" a mathematics and physics instructor of very high competence, who demanded and usually received the best efforts they could muster.

Their years of attendance at the high school do not seem to affect the country Indians' purely instrumental attitude toward education. If anything, it becomes more intense, or, in some cases, even internalized. Children in the sixth or seventh grade often insist that they "really like" arithmetic, or drawing, or "reading library books." Eighth and ninth graders may cheerfully add: "My parents tell me to do my best in school work, and try hard to pass the grade i (sic) am in." But those who have stuck it out till the eleventh or twelfth grades rarely remark that any of their classwork is interesting or pleasant. Some still pick and choose: "I play hookey from English because I just don't care for it." Others are satisfied to "take all they can" from the school. And most, if cued, will remark with an almost grim matter-of-factness: "You *have* to finish school to get a good job."

Differences between Young Men (17 to 20) and Youths (14 to 16)

The most striking difference between the young men who have attended high school for three or four years and those who have dropped out in the ninth grade appears in their behavior toward White adults. The former are relatively competent and self-assured and express themselves with considerable freedom, especially to young men near their own age. The latter are reduced to a kind of catatonic silence in the presence of any stranger.

There can be no doubt that in this respect at least, attending the high school has been of considerable benefit to these young people. It is here that they have learned to speak English with fair fluency:

> You know, (when I went to day school) I never learned to talk English good. But after I went to high school, well, everybody talked English so I had to talk English. That's how I learned.

They have also learned that all White persons or strange Indians who talk to them about school or their future are not truant officers trying to force them to betray their peers. When they come to know an interviewer and are relatively at ease, they answer many questions with a fluency and detail characteristic of their elders. But fluent as these young country Indians may be, none has as yet developed the insights possessed by certain of the Mixedblood boys and a few of the older country Indians. They seem unaware that a stranger may misunderstand or only partially understand what they are saying because he has a completely different point of view.

Whatever conclusions are drawn from these phenomena should take the following additional facts into account. Young persons attending the Catholic Mission schools do not seem to develop the "adolescent withdrawal" reaction to anywhere near the degree of the young people who attend the Bureau day schools. Other young people who leave the reservation as children or drop out of high school and enter the Armed Services often speak more fluent English and are less "bashful" before White people than are the graduates of OCHS. Again, some of the young people who left school after the eighth grade and are now 19, 20, or 21 years of age have lost a good deal of the reticence and diffidence which they presumably had four or five years ago. They are still shy, but some are willing to converse with White people and a fair proportion of them would like to obtain some vocational training.

CHAPTER VI

THE YOUNG COUNTRY INDIAN WOMAN IN HIGH SCHOOL

General Characteristics of Country Indian High School Girls

Country Indian girls enrolled in the ninth and tenth grades are primarily and intensely interested in boys, fashionable dress, transistor radios, and record players. They enjoy gossip, teasing other girls, "raising cain" in the classrooms, and going to the school "movies." Most of all they enjoy and need the companionship of their "girl friends," that is, the girls with whom they attended the day school. A few of the more conservative young women named the dining room detail as their favorite high school activity, because (we surmise) setting tables and washing dishes gives them the opportunity to gossip, joke, and work competently together in the relaxed and undemanding fashion that many Indian (and other women) find rewarding and reassuring.

About teachers these girls volunteer very little information. If asked, they say laconically that "teachers are all right" or that some teacher is "nice" or some other teacher is "mean." In scholastic or intellectual matters they show even less interest. Some will tell a white interviewer or an older Indian relative that they "like school" and are doing well in their studies; but when a young man or a Mixed-blood girl asks them about classwork they giggle and hasten to assert that they hate the formal part of school and attend only "because there's nothing else to do," "my parents make me come," or "I'd miss my friends if I quit." While this pointed disinterest in scholastic work is sometimes exaggerated, most of these young women are attracted by the social and recreational opportunities offered in however limited a degree by the high school, Pine Ridge town, and the bars and juke boxes of the nearby off-reservation town of White Clay. Toward formal learning they direct a minimum of effort and no affect whatever. In this general preference for social as opposed to scholastic activity, they resemble most of the young women attending high schools in the United States.

New Entrants

We interviewed five of the country Indian girls who came from one of the day school districts to enroll in high school, August 1962. Three or four months after the school had been in session these young ladies were still uncomfortable and ill at ease in their new environment and were finding little to enjoy. None belonged to any club or extra-curricular activity. When asked why this was, most looked embarrassed and implied that they were not interested, but one unusually talkative girl, the daughter of a college oriented country Indian family, explained that she wanted very much to join certain clubs but had been barred because her grades were too low. When asked whether they liked living in the dormitories, some of the girls giggled and said that it could be fun because they (and the other girls) kept "raising cain" all the time. Others, discussing the same phenomenon, complained that "the girls are quarreling at each other all the time" and that the noise and discord bothered them. Most admitted to playing hookey occasionally, especially if they disliked a particular teacher. However, at this early stage of a high school girl's career, hookey playing seems to consist of cutting a particular class and using the time to stroll about the streets of Pine Ridge with another girl. A girl may also play hookey by pretending to be ill, and thereupon she may remain in bed until her girl friends come and coax her into getting up and going to classes again.

In the summer of 1964 we obtained an additional set of interviews - from five girls again from the same district but after they had attended the high school for a year. While quiet and shy, these "veterans" spoke of their high school experiences with enthusiasm and all said they wished to return:

> It's different from ________ [day school] but once we get used to it we like it very much. It's lotta fun, specially when they have football games and movies, every Wednesday and Saturday nights - and sometimes we have school dances and specially the basketball season - it's lotta fun. Some of the classes I don't like. But some of the subject I take up I'm really interested in them. I like mathematics and I'm doing well. When I was going to ________ [day school] I really get tired of school sometimes. The same old thing, going around every day. But over at boarding school it's lots of different things - - all kinds of activities are going on ... and then I learn to talk to other kids. I'm not bashful any more, and I could talk to anybody now.

Our Lakota speaking interviewer opined that these girls were still "kinda shy" and that they tended to exaggerate their conquest of bashfulness. Nevertheless, she too was impressed: "Last year we can't get nothing out of them. They just nod their head or shake their head or something like that. Now they speak up a little. It really surprised me the way they could answer me now."[22]

Problems of the First Two Years

When these young women talk spontaneously or in non-directed fashion about what goes on in school most of them explain how desperately they need clothing or money for school supplies. We ourselves were surprised at the number of items for which the girls needed money:

> We need clothing - and like school papers, and some of the kids have to furnish their pencils and erasers, and soap and lotions and stuff. We have to buy something like that every weekend. And then there's spending money, like when we go to shows or dances, and if we go on a school trip we have to have money for it.

Or girls tell animated and complicated tales of feuds with other girls, involving insults, thefts, competition over boys, and dramatic accusations to school authorities and to Indian elders. Indeed, for some of these young women the school and classrooms are a little world in which their small clique ("my friends" or "the girls I run around with") engage in an intense, congested, and ruthless social struggle with other small cliques of country Indian and "boarder" girls. The occasional violent physical battles between girls seem to be only the most obvious part of these bitter feuds.[23]

Invidious Distinction in Dress

While a social scientist may see the disadvantages of the country Indian girls grossly in terms of the social stratification of the Reservation or even of the greater society, the girls themselves relate their handicaps almost entirely to the fact that they must appear in this new and challenging environment wearing the shabby and faded garments of their day school years:

> The first day of (high) school when I went into the classroom, I looked at the other girls and then I looked at myself. My clothes were just faded and out of style, and I was embarrassed. Everybody was sizing me up, and I felt I was a freak. I sure didn't feel good.
>
> * * * * * * * * * *
>
> It was kinda hard at first because I didn't have the kinda clothes that I was supposed to wear. The other girls dressed up so nice and I felt out of place with my old clothes that I had ever since the seventh grade . . .
>
> I didn't know what to do and I almost quit school because I couldn't get help from nobody. My grandmother and grandfather raised us, but they're Fullblood Indian and they don't care how people (respondent is embarrassed and gropes for words) . . . They just . . . all my grandmother said was: "As long as you have clean clothes on you - you don't need to buy clothes every day."
>
> And I said to her: "It isn't that. I got clean clothes but they're not like the other kids wear."
>
> My clothes were just out of style and my grandma and grandpa don't even understand how other people - White people - do.

If her impoverished parents or guardians cannot or will not get her the clothing she asks for, the country Indian high school girl may drop out of school in the belief that if she had been able to get the right clothes she would have become a high school graduate. If her parents scrape together the cash for a stylish ready-made outfit, she remains in school only to be hopelessly outclassed by the "Mixedblood girls" on some different level of ambition: she is likely to find that she needs yet more expensive clothes, or that she is maneuvered out of some coveted office or award, or that she has not been assigned to the course work necessary for college entrance. No country Indian girl seems able to perceive that what the high school demands of her is a radical transformation of herself. While her teachers lecture her and tell her: "Don't be like your forefathers," she herself defines her situation quite differently and feels that her troubles spring from the fact that she is not able to "do like White people."

How far the country Indian girls deviate from the standards of sartorial elegance set by the high school elite and something also of how they feel about this deviance was revealed to us by one of our field workers, a style-conscious Mixedblood girl. This young lady appended a vivid description of the appearance of her subjects to each interview. Here is her description of the Mixedblood daughter of a Bureau official:

> Marian has a good complexion and cute curls on her hair. She wears a trench coat and good sneakers. Her clothes are well pressed, very neat . . . she is a very lovely girl.

Here is her description of two country Indian girls:

> May is tall, very heavy boned, and also very plump. She has attractive features but needs to reduce a great deal . . . She wore an old white sweater, faded white blouse, and a green, home-made, cotton skirt that was also faded. She had bobby socks rolled Hollywood bobby-soxer style and loafers.
>
> Louise had on a white blouse, skirt, and navy blue sweater, all of which had seen their days.

On one occasion our modishly dressed and relatively sophisticated field worker made an appointment with a country Indian high school girl who at their first meeting was clad in a dress which "had its time almost well spent in wear." But a few days later when the interview took place:

> I had to ask her if she was Leona. (She had) changed into a brand-new-looking over the waist blouse and black skirt with her hair curled and swept into a mature, evening style - it was so different to see her!

To all of her respondents this interviewer put the query: "If I gave you $100.00 what would you do?" Without exception all of the country Indian high school girls replied: "Buy clothes" - not hats or gloves, but "skirts and blouses . . . the clothes I need."[24] One country Indian ninth grader was asked: "If you could be anyone in the whole world, who would you like to be?" After long thought the girl replied: "Brenda Lee - because she's got good clothes and makes good records."

The famishing hunger for clothing "like the other kids have" is so strong that we suspect that some of these young women would do literally any kind of work - even potato picking - to obtain a stylish wardrobe. It seems likely that some would leave high school immediately if they were offered the alternative of moderately well paid factory work or even moderately well paid domestic work.

> Int: If you quit school to work would your mother make you come back to school?
> Res: I don't know.
> Int: Would you like to work?
> Res: Yes. But I can't find a job . . .
> Int: Would you like working better than going to school?
> Res: Yes. (Respondent is in the ninth grade)

The situation of these young people is peculiarly frustrating because they live in one of the most depressed communities in the country. When R. Wax once remarked to an Indian matron that it would be nice if the girls could work and earn money for their clothes, the matron looked bewildered and said, "But even the men with families can't find any work."

While a few of the young people manage to earn a little money working for relatives, most of them assume (in Indian logic) that since it is their parents who are pressuring them to remain in school then the responsibility for providing them with correct clothing also is their parents'.[25] Most parents, of course, cannot afford anything like adequate clothing, and the statement, "My folks couldn't get me the clothes I needed," becomes the stereotypical "reason" for dropping out of school. It is offered almost as frequently by boys as by girls. In our opinion, however, inadequate clothing is not so much a cause of dropout as the most obvious and most easily proffered symptom of the complex disadvantaged situation of the country Indian high school student.

There may, however, be a deeper level of meaning to the statement: "My folks couldn't get me the clothes and the other things I needed." This possibility was called to our attention when we compared the statement of a particularly intelligent and reflective young male dropout with statements made by the half dozen country Indian boys who had managed to stay in the high school until the twelfth grade. The dropout said: "You know, a lot of kids drop out because their folks aren't helping them in school - aren't supporting them." The twelfth graders made it clear that their folks have been a constant and sometimes unrelenting source of support - not only providing them with money for clothing, but urging them to stay in school and making it very hard for them to leave. It is possible therefore that when some of the dropouts write to their parents for clothing they are asking for tangible evidence of their folks' interest in their "sticking it out" no matter how tempted they are to drop out. That they sometimes ask for things which they know their parents cannot give them, adds another dimension of meaning.

One is tempted to relate the adolescent Indian's hunger for new clothing, transistor radios, and cosmetics to the numerous stories about stealing in the high school dormitories. Here, however, it is worth noting that theft is not so much a matter of the paupers stealing from the rich as of the experienced boarders stealing from the newer arrivals. The children of the relatively wealthy parents do not complain about theft. Rather, it is the newly arrived country Indian boarders who complain that the experienced boarders make off with the clothing, luxuries and school supplies bought for them by their parents. Students have no way of securing their property, for though the school provides lockers, the authorities forbid the use of locks.

> Some of the kids are really bad. Sometimes they'll break into our suitcase. Or if we have money in our pockets, they'll take off our overalls and search our pockets and get our money. Some boarders are really mean. All they want to do is steal - and they don't want to study. They'll steal your school work off from you and they'll copy it . . . So finally I just came home . . . If I could be a day scholar out of my four years I think I'll stay in. But if they want me to board I don't want to go back. I think I'll just quit.
>
> [Statement by young man in ninth grade.]
>
> * * * * * * * * * * *
>
> When I was a boarder I really have a hard time with the boys. Every chance they get they break into my suitcase and they steal everything I have. Or they'll be borrowing money from me. And they don't care to pay it back. I wanted to quit for a while and I was going to join the Navy. But my parents promised that if I go back I could be a day scholar.
>
> [Statement by young man in tenth grade.]
>
> * * * * * * * * * * *
>
> Int: Did you ever feel like quitting school?
> Res: Yes (she warms up at this). When the girls steal my clothes.
> Int: What did they take?
> Res: My underclothes and socks.
> Int: When was the last time?
> Res: Last month.
> Int: What do you do when they do this?
> Res: Go home.
> Int: How long did you stay home last time?
> Res: Two days.
> Int: Who brought you back?
> Res: My mother.
> Int: Do they steal all the time?
> Res: Yes. Lipsticks too.
> Int: If they don't quit stealing, will you quit?
> Res: Yes.
> Int: Do they do this to other girls?
> Res: Yes . . . The worst thing about school is some kids like to steal.
>
> [At the time of this interview, respondent was in the ninth grade. Despite her threats she did not leave school and is now entering the eleventh grade.]

There is evidence that stealing in the dormitories involves more than covetousness. Some of the stories recall descriptions of life in penal institutions, where the old hands systematically strip the newcomers of all their valuables. Theft is also a very convenient form of revenge. Conversely, an accusation of theft can be a potent weapon, for the school authorities react to such a complaint with great energy, instituting extensive searches, and giving heavy punishments.

"I Would Miss My Friends"

When a young staff member, casually chatting with high school pupils asked them: "If you had a problem who would you see?" the usual answer of both young men and women was: "My friend." But when the same students filled in the formal questionnaire they almost always stated that, if they needed help, they would turn to their parents, a teacher, or another elder. While these young people may make a distinction between a problem and "needing help," the general tenor of their statements suggests that many are drawn to school, kept there, and emotionally supported there by their friends who are - almost always - classmates. Should their friends drop out, they will find it almost impossible to stay. Should their friends remain while they drop out, they will find life outside of school unbearably dull.

> Since I quit school I am reminded every day what a big mistake I made by quitting school . . . seeing my classmates and hearing them talking about school is torture. So I plan to go back no matter how much I want to quit. [Eleventh grade dropout who has since returned to school.]

Most of our evidence about the significance of this friendship is implicit or oblique, but the following accounts reveal something of its power. In the first account a young man is explaining why he dropped out of school in the eleventh grade:

> I didn't like the teacher - that Mrs. _______. She really treats us mean and pretty soon me and some other boys don't go to her class anymore because we don't like her. So she reported us to the principal and the principal got after us and made us go even if we didn't like it. And he punished us a couple of times and made us stay in school after four, studying, and sometimes we don't get to go to shows and parties and things like that.
>
> And there's this one boy, I and him goes around together so we get the same punishment. When I get punished he gets the same thing. He's a real nice boy, and he is really good at basketball. And when I just left, this boy done the same thing. It was funny. I told him I was going to leave school and he said: "If you're not around, then I'm the only one that's going to get punished, so I might as well go too.
>
> I kinda feel sorry for him because if he had stayed in school he would have been a good basketball player.

Many country Indian students complained about this particular teacher, but all were reluctant to tell us why they disliked her so much. They did, however, tell country Indian staff workers that she called them "Dumb Indians," and made remarks like "If I had a stupid face like yours I wouldn't be sitting in this classroom." When we ourselves observed this teacher's classroom, she seemed merely to be making unusually vigorous attempts to shame the country Indians into giving up their country Indian ways. She was not so much deliberately cruel as imperceptive and insensitive. There are a few other teachers like this:

> Int: Do the other kids ever feel ashamed for not knowing the answer?
> Res: Yes. Especially when the teacher gets after them.
> Int: What does she say?
> Res: Oh, she tells them that they shouldn't be like their forefathers. That they should speak up and things like that. That they shouldn't act bashful.
> Int: What do they do?
> Res: They just get ashamed and blush. The rest of us [country Indians], we just get real mad at the teacher. She's always telling us things like that and making us mad . . . When she does that to some kids, I try to talk with them when I'm in the dorm. I try to make them feel better. They're my friends and we can go around together even if they don't talk [in class]. It makes me mad when the teachers do things like that to them.

Hookey Playing

There are many varieties of hookey playing. Sometimes a student will merely cut a class and hang around the campus or stroll through Pine Ridge town. Or younger boys will take off for the day and hide in the creek bed, fooling around. One girl told a story of how she and several girl friends had tried to get drunk on a pint of wine which they diluted with water. "We didn't get drunk at all but we thought we would holler and fool around pretending like we were drunk." Girls with strict parents may feign illness, go to bed, and stay there for several days.

More girls speak of "running around" and "going to White Clay" than do the boys.[26] Since beer and gas cost money, one wonders where these young people get the funds to do as much "running around" as they claim to be doing.[27] A few girls, according to their complaining elders, spend more time playing hookey than attending class:

> Larita is really running around. She hasn't been to her classes for a week. Everyday she just got on the (school) bus and then she would get off and hitchhike to White Clay. Her mother thought she was in school.

> I think her mother went and brought her back from White Clay last Sunday. Her mother said that she wrote a note to the principal and to the bus driver. She told the bus driver to wait and see that Larita went into her classroom. She told the principal to get the police after her if she doesn't go to school.

Younger girls or those in the ninth grade often discuss hookey playing as if it were a regular and entirely acceptable part of being a high school student. (In the following interchange, two country Indian high school girls are talking with a young man:)

> Y. Man: How come you're playing hookey?
> Carol: I didn't finish my assignment.
> Y. Man: Won't they do anything to you?
> Carol: Naah.
> Y. Man: It's real easy to play hookey?
> Carol: Yeah.
> Y. Man: What'll your teachers think?
> Carol: They'll just think I didn't come in on the bus.
> Y. Man: What'll happen when you have to go to the office?
> Carol: I'll just pick up an excuse slip.
> Rose: It's just a habit.
> Y. Man: What do you mean?
> Rose: I been doing it all last week with her.

Another ninth grade girl wrote in the following response on her questionnaire: WHEN I FEEL LIKE PLAYING HOOKEY "I make plans with a friend. Next morning I wait for the friend (and then we) hide up a hill or ditch." Other ninth graders, with similar innocence or nonchalance, replied to the same question as follows: WHEN I FEEL LIKE PLAYING HOOKEY: "I play hookey," or, "I just take of (off)." On the other hand, older girls in the eleventh and twelfth grade may be torn between their notion of what they ought to do and what they like to do: WHEN I FEEL LIKE PLAYING HOOKEY: "I walk down town, even though I know I'll get behind in my studies. But yet I get tempted and can't resist being free from school, although I'm not really free."

Again a few girls, with very strict parents, do not go to White Clay at all, at least during their first or second year at school. Yet, by the time they reach the tenth grade, most of the country girls and the less restricted town girls seem to make rather frequent excursions to White Clay. (It should be emphasized that for most of the high school students drinking beer and running around is not a symptom of individual or social degeneration. These young people do not drink because they are neurotic, unbalanced, or unhappy. They drink because drinking and running around with their friends is more fun, more interesting and exciting, than sitting in a classroom.)

If a girl wishes to remain in school, she can usually keep her forbidden recreational activities from the attention of the authorities. But if school has become an unbearable bore, she will become careless, and, perhaps, play hookey for days or a week at a time. Eventually she will be found out and punished, usually by "restrictions" to which she pays little or no attention. If the authorities become too annoying, she may drop out. Or she may be expelled for brawling or becoming pregnant. If her parents are ambitious for her, they will feel badly, for most of them have come to realize the face value of a high school diploma.

Some idea of the complexity of the covert high school social life may be gained from the long stories told by two female dropouts. Barbara, a bright and pretty tenth grader, told the following involved tale:

> In September I lost a transistor radio that cost me about $39.00. I told the matron and the matron searched the kids and she couldn't find anything. So she reported it to the principal and the principal came over and searched the whole room. A week later those girls ganged up and beat me up - because they were the ones that stole the radio.
>
> So I went home. The principal wanted me to go back and he said those girls would be expelled. So I went back and those girls (that beat me) were expelled.
>
> But then those Mixedblood girls kept making fun of me - the way I dress and the way I talk. And this month, just before Easter, I took back two pairs of new shoes and I lost one pair (that is, they were stolen). Hand lotion, hair-spray, pencils, and other things - I lost those too. That's why I quit (the second time).
>
> I got so tired of this that finally I do everything I could to stay out of school. I'd play hookey and I'd sneak out of the girl's dormitory. And I'd run around with other girls. Pretty soon the principal reported me to my grandmother. So my grandmother went over there and got me out of school . . . I was crying, but she was just mad and she pulled me out of school.

How much of this story was accepted as true by Barbara's conservative grandparents we do not know. But her grandmother quietly told our staff worker that the real reason she took Barbara out of school was that she "was really running around." Her grandfather said, angrily, that he would sue the school for Barbara's stolen clothes and added: "That Boarding School is more like a reform school." Thereupon, Barbara added:

> I was playing hookey real bad last month. I never went to school except for two or three days. I was just running around White Clay. I even went to Rushville with them girls. I never did get caught until this last time when somebody reported that I was missing for three days. That's when my grandmother went over. She was really mad.

Viola, one of the girls expelled because of Barbara's accusations, told quite a different story. According to her account, she, Barbara, and two other girls were room mates, and Barbara was "always sneaking out and staying out after hours." Following the peer group code, they did not report her, though, according to school regulations, they were supposed to do so. Barbara, however, pushed her luck too far, and was eventually caught by the matron. Thereupon her room mates were punished for not informing, "They kept us from going to shows and dances and they put us on restriction":

> Then about a week later Barbara tried to sneak off again - so I told her not to because we'd get all the blame. I told her we're gonna get blamed for everything she does any more. Then I guess Barbara got mad and ran away from school and went home to her grandmother.

Then (according to Viola) Barbara's grandfather "went on the war path" and descended on the principal's office, brandishing receipts to the amount of two hundred dollars. These, he claimed, represented monies paid out for clothes stolen from Barbara by her room mates. "He threatened to sue the school." Thereupon, "the principal kind of took up on his side and expelled all three of those girls [Viola and her room mates]." Viola stayed at home from September until Easter. Then Barbara's grandmother took her out of school. Hearing of this, Viola and her father requested that Viola be readmitted to the high school. "But the principal told me I couldn't start again until next year." Today, a year and a half later, Viola refuses to go back to school and prefers to "run around," though her father, who is relatively well off, and her sisters, who are high school graduates, keep urging her to return. Barbara was sent by her grandparents to a distant high school "where only White people go." She complained of being lonely, came home, and is now "making up her mind" whether to go back to OCHS or to Mission.

This kind of feud is, perhaps, one of the less edifying examples of how some country Indians learn to manipulate the high school administration. Less sophisticated country girls do not usually try to involve Indian adults or White people in their quarrels:

> My little sister, she's got exzema, or whatever they call that, and the other little girls really give her a bad time. One time, one little girl didn't want to sit by her in the same dining room. She said, "I don't want to eat with her because she's got sores. So my sister cried and she got up and walked out of the dining room.
>
> So I got up and I went after her and I asked her: "What's the matter?" And she told me, you know, what that little girl said. So I went to that little girl and I said: "You shouldn't make fun in front of my sister." And she said: "Shut up, or I'll tell my big sister on you."
>
> After we left the dining room this big girl came up and she said: "You leave my sister alone." And I said: "You tell your little sister to leave my sister alone.

> She's been making fun of her and she doesn't want to eat, and everybody's been teasing her."
>
> And she said, "She don't do like that," and she grabbed me by the hair so I just beat her up . . . I don't care. I'd rather be a big trouble than to be pushed around."[28]

The Girls' Eye View of Scholastic Work

Some topics of conversation are avoided by respondents because they are embarrassing, others because they are boring. For most high school girls, scholastic work seems to fall into the latter category.[29] Most of the younger girls showed no interest whatever in our numerous and carefully prepared questions about favorite subjects, good teachers, or "things they disliked or liked about school."

> Int: Which is your favorite class?
> Res: None. (Snickers)
> Int: Why? Don't you like school?
> Res: N-a-aw.
> Int: You mean you don't like any class?
> Res: I don't care for any class . . ..
> Int: Do you ever feel like quitting school?
> Res: (laughs and laughs and giggles) All the time.

What these girls did make clear to us was that they did not like, dislike, or, indeed, have any strong interest in any scholastic subject, qua subject. Instead, they mildly preferred to go to classes where they performed competently or where they liked the teacher, and they tended to cut classes where they performed poorly or could not get along with the teacher. In this latter respect, they resemble all students known to us.

While the girls' definition of the role of teachers does not seem to differ much from that of the young man, they seem more inclined to continue their day school pattern of spectacular physical incompetence.[30] As in the day school, one may see some of them sitting back in their seats wearing expressions of dreamy stupidity, while the teacher collects and folds their papers. Or, if they are working on an assignment, they may call the teacher for help as if the latter were a waitress. Our country Indian research assistant was somewhat taken aback when some of these girls handed our fill-in questionnaire back to her and told her to write down their answers for them. As she put it:

> You know, some of those high school students don't even know how to write or read. Or maybe they do, but they are too bashful to do anything . . . Some of them even wanted me to fill out their survey forms for them. So sometimes I had to read the questions for them and then they tell me the answer and I write it down for them.
>
> It's kinda funny. Since they are in high school they could (should) do things for themselves. But they act so

> helpless. I guess they still have that crazy ______ [day school] habit. They sit back and let somebody else do their errands for them.

Like the eighth grade dropouts, country Indian girls attending high school favor instruction in English rather than in Lakota.

> I would like the teachers to speak English because I want to speak English better.
>
> * * * * * * * * * * *
>
> If teachers could talk Indian it would be nice, but if they do I think a student won't learn to speak English well, as I have learned to speak English this way.

On being quizzed, most of them admitted that they were having difficulty with their class work because of their incompetence in the English language:

> Int: Do you have trouble here in class?
> Res: Yes.
> Int: Why?
> Res: I guess it's because the teachers use big words. I can't understand what they say.
>
> * * * * * * * * *
>
> Int: Did you have trouble understanding the teacher in day school?
> Res: No.
> Int: How about now (in high school)?
> Res: Yes.
> Int: Do you wish that the teacher would speak simple words or Lakota?
> Res: Simple words.

Even a tenth grader who comes from a bilingual family stated that she still had trouble understanding teachers when they "talked fast."

As might be expected these girls' image of college depended on whether a sister or older female relative had ever attended such an institution. The youngest child of an ambitious family, whose four older siblings attended trade schools or teachers' colleges, stated that she would have to go to college to "learn to be a stenographer" because "my parents say that if my brothers and sisters did it I have to do it too." When asked why she wanted to be a stenographer she said, "Because they make good money and have higher pay and they work for just one certain man." When asked about "the one certain man" she dissolved into giggles.

Girls from less determined and less sophisticated families also say that they expect to go to college:

> Int: What are you going to do after you graduate?
> Res: I don't know. I guess I go to college.
> Int: Where?
> Res: I don't know.

Int: What do you want to study?
Res: I don't know . . .
Int: What do you think college is?
Res: Is it something like here? Dorms, except that you study harder?
Int: Have you ever been to a college campus?
Res: No.
Int: Has anyone in your family ever been to college?
Res: No.
Int: Have you ever talked to someone that has gone to college?
Res: No.

On another occasion our interviewer subjected an even more taciturn Indian girl to a similar inquisition and again received a series of "No's" and "Don't knows." But when she asked the Indian girl "What do you want to be?" the latter's face suddenly lit up, and she said, "loudly, clearly and proudly," "A nurse." Our interviewer then asked "Do you know someone that's a nurse?" "Yvonne Black Horse," said the respondent.

It might be added that scarcely any of the country Indian girls seemed aware of any other vocation for "educated" women than nurse or stenographer. This is curious because there are some fairly well paid Indian professional women at Pine Ridge, but all of them are Mixedbloods.

Concluding Comments

We have here presented only the general point of view of the country Indian high school student. A complementary depiction of the point of view of the other students - the town dwellers, the elite, the "boarders," the poor and the well-to-do Mixedbloods, and the professional Indians - would be equally interesting and likely far more complicated. These town-dwelling families differ sharply and widely in income, background, and interests. Though they live near each other, they do not form an integrated community. Many Mixedbloods do not socialize with country Indians and, as compared to them, they do not socialize as freely with each other. The social mingling of White and Indian Bureau personnel is limited; indeed, most of the White staff members cannot mix freely with each other because of the hierarchical organization in which they work.

In the high school the offspring of these heterogeneous families, boarders and town dwellers, create their own little cliques, distinguished by new and expensive apparel, marginal and ephemeral fads, "popularity" with the popular peers of both sexes, and the kind of socio-political skill that will get a girl elected cheer leader or Homecoming Queen. In these elite provincial circles, the country Indian girl, with her outdated and faded clothes, her bashful and passionate ways, her limiting loyalties and appetite for pleasure, her broken English, and inadequate scholastic training, has no place. She usually does not possess the resources to enter such cliques, alter them, or ignore them.

Almost all of the extra-curricular social activities approved or sponsored by the high school authorities are carried on by a self-consciously superior elite clique before a silent, bewildered, and sometimes resentful audience of provincials, who are not so much ruled out of the game as defined as the kind of people who cannot hope to qualify. Behind this facade, and infinitely more important, is the covert society of the boarders which sets the norms that govern the behavior of most of the students. In this area, teachers, guidance workers, and other outsiders know very little about what goes on. During the first and second years at high school the boarders' efforts to dominate and shape up the newcomers are generally seen (by the newcomers) as the machinations of "those mean Mixedbloods." A number of country Indian girls insist that they left high school because they were persecuted by cliques of "Mixedblood" girls.

Country Indians who remain in school until their third year usually become a part of the boarder society. They have learned the ropes, or, as one boy put it: "If you learn how to be a boarder, it's not bad." By this time boarders and country Indians, Mixedblood and Fullblood, have been welded into one group so far as their relationships to each other and to the school authorities are concerned. Though a country Indian may still use "Mixedblood" in a tone of derogation, his closest friend may be a town bred youth of mixed blood. It is this upper-classmen group that now holds "the real control of the school."[31]

A number of social scientists have noted that high schools, especially those in towns or rural communities, tend to maintain and re-enforce the status distinctions that prevail within the larger community.[32] The situation at OCHS is even more complicated. To remain in high school a country Indian must accommodate himself to two major sets of alien norms, those of the Bureau high school authorities and those of the entrenched society of boarders. That these norms usually conflict does not simplify his task. Thus, a spirited young man, following the norms of his day school peer group, may wildly defy the administration and be forced out of school. Or he may get into trouble by trying to emulate the boarders, for example, by playing hookey before he knows how to keep from getting caught. A girl may at first find high school intolerable because of the overbearing behavior of female boarders. On the other hand, she may become an accepted member of a boarder clique and find that running around and drinking with the new friends has become so exciting that she is unable to keep up even the pretense of attending class.

CHAPTER VII

THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF DROPPING OUT

Long and detailed statements about the circumstances of their leaving school were obtained from twenty-three young people aged fifteen to twenty-one (twelve young women and fourteen young men). We will here present an analysis of their statements, not as the reasons or causes of dropping out, but rather as an exposition of how these young people themselves view and explain their experiences.

Before proceeding we should note that seven of the twelve girls dropped out and returned to school one or more times (one, interviewed as a dropout, is now back in school). One girl said that she had left school and returned on four different occasions. Of these repetitive dropouts some had confined their attempts to OCHS; others, after leaving OCHS, had tried the Holy Rosary Mission or a public high school. The young men did less of this repetitive jumping from school to school. In our selected sample of fourteen, only four had tried several high schools and one of these was the "wild" son of well-to-do Mixedblood parents, who moved their son from one school to another.[33]

Male Dropouts

Of the fourteen young men in the selected sample, eleven left high school during or directly after the ninth grade, one dropped out after completing the tenth, and two during the eleventh grade. About half of those who dropped out in the ninth grade said that the shift from the country day school was a distressing and even a miserable experience. Three pointed out matter-of-factly that their parents were very poor and that they could not afford even the clothing required of them as boarders. Two added that when they found boarding impossible or intolerable they tried to catch rides and to attend as day scholars, but the whole procedure had been too troublesome.[34] On the other hand, two boys asserted that they would not go back to school even if they were given proper clothing, for, as they put it, they knew they were "dumb." Having "barely made it through eighth grade," they found that in high school they could not "figure out even simple questions." Besides, they were so bashful (quiet and unaggressive) that they could not stand up for themselves, and the bolder high school youths took cruel advantage of them. One added that he could not bear to "stand up and talk before the class."

Of the other male dropouts, seven gave one clear and cogent reason for leaving school: a direct and impulsive collision with the school authorities. They "stole a government car," "busted an $85.00 mirror," got drunk, sassed a teacher, or, in the case of an eleventh grader, left school rather than attend a class where the teacher had humiliated him.[35] Another eleventh grader, we were told, knocked this teacher down when she tried to stop him in the hallway. For these offenses, the youths were either expelled or punished by "restrictions." Most of the country

Indian youths seem unable to tolerate the long drawn out punishment of sitting in classes all day and in the dormitories all night. Sooner or later, they "take off," that is, they go home and stay there. When questioned, these involuntary dropouts remarked that they (like the other students) suffered from lack of clothing and found their school subjects very difficult. Nevertheless, most of them stated or implied that they found high school tolerable or even agreeable and that, given the choice, they would have preferred to stay in school. As one put it:

> I kept getting drunk so I guess that's what made me quit. But I never did want to quit.

Of the three young men who stayed in school until the tenth or eleventh grade one explained that he left because school had become a pointless bore: "I was just sitting there doing anything to pass the time." He now has a job at the "Fish" factory. The young man who left because he would not attend a class where the teacher insulted him also works at the "Fish" factory. (Before we had located this young fellow, the high school principal asked us to tell him that he could have a high school diploma if he were willing to take only one course - the course taught by this teacher. When we relayed this message the young man told us that he would like to return to high school but would never do so if it meant attending that particular teacher's class.) Another eleventh grade dropout (a town boy) told us:

> I don't really know what it was (made me quit). I just didn't fit in anymore.
>
> I guess it seemed like I was a lot older than the rest of the guys . . . and I just wasn't like them any more. So I'd get restless and I'd come down town and find one of those guys I'd been running around with. Then we'll drive up and down the streets and then maybe we'll go to White Clay and have a few beers or shoot some pool.

The effect that the family of a high school pupil may have on his career is nicely illustrated by the case histories of these two young men. The former (who refused to submit to a particular teacher) received little assistance or sympathy from his folks when he left school. The latter (who knocked this same teacher down) was expelled, but his relatives made such a fuss through the tribal council that he was re-enrolled almost immediately.

At first hearing it seems odd that one category of dropouts (the quiet and well-behaved youths) state that they dislike school, while another (the bold and boisterous) profess to like school or, at least, insist that it is not so bad. While we, being outsiders, have only incomplete data, we suggest the following working hypothesis for future investigators of this and other high schools: On entering the high school most of the country Indian boys are like the "quiet ones," lonely, frightened, ashamed of their poor clothing, humiliated by their inability to talk English, and easily bullied and robbed by the "veterans." Those who have sympathetic relatives and a pleasant home may try at once to leave school. However, newcomers do manage to find pals or friends "to go around with," and the painful and degrading aspects of school then become endurable. In time, they may even come to enjoy some aspects of school life. Yet maintaining their status among their pals means (for male Sioux adolescents) engaging in defiant and daring deeds forbidden by the authorities. Those who are older and wiser, having survived years of boarding school, rarely get caught, or if they should be caught and punished, some of them have no place to go and so they must, perforce, sit out their "restrictions." But the casualties among the reckless and inexperienced country Indian newcomers are high. Often apprehended and punished, they are ejected or flee from the high school. For most of them, this is the end of their formal education.

Female Dropouts

A girl who drops out early in her high school career offers complaints very like those of the boys. She does not have "the clothes I need" or the lipsticks, shoes, or hair lotion; she has been robbed of the precious watch or transistor radio given by a parent; some teachers are "mean" or "won't explain;" she has a great deal of trouble "keeping up with my grade." Those girls who remain until the tenth grade or who keep dropping out and trying again add new complaints: the Mixedblood girls (usually boarders) pick on them; other girls steal their belongings out of spite; or "the other girls are always quarrelling at me." Indeed, one of the major reasons for changing schools seems to be the desire to avoid a clique of vindictive female enemies.

We suggest that the progress of country Indian girls in high school is in some respects like and in other unlike the progress of the young men. Like the young men they go through an initial period of bewildered and lonely misery. Those who find "pals" or "friends" decide to stay; those who do not tend to drop out. But whereas many of the young men who join peer groups and begin "to like high school," tend to commit reckless acts which bring them into open conflict with the authorities, the young women (whether they drop out or not) ignore the authorities and try to face up to and live with the social situation as they define it. Many perceive relatively early in their school careers that the children of the Mixedbloods and the Bureau Employees are "away ahead of them," in clothes, scholastic preparation, and influence within the schools. If they are bashful, overage, poor students, and not very muscular, they may give up the struggle and drop out. But if they can "run around" they will stay for a year or two and fight - literally and figuratively - for prestige and popularity, both within the school and within the world of hookey players. But whether they and their girl friends "compete" for prestige within the school - e.g., snaring a coveted male as escort for a school dance - or in the bars of White Clay, their activities are likely to end with their dropping out of school. In the first event, they may, like pretty Anna Louise,[36] be hounded out of school by a clique of experienced rivals, who call her "squaw" and "make fun of her" at every opportunity. In the other event, they are likely to plunge too enthusiastically into the world of hookey players and so become what their elders call "real crazy," that is, completely wild and irresponsible. Such girls use the high school only as a place to stay when they are not "running around" drinking and engaging in courtship activities. They rarely finish high school.[37]

While the informal young men's groups seem to devote a fair part of their energy to harassing the administration and the authorities, we would hazard that the young women rarely do so. This statement may be too simple, but there is some truth in the contention that the boys organize in order to fight or at least outwit the "outsiders," whereas the girls organize to live in and enjoy the school - getting along with or fighting with other girls. If the teachers and guidance people "leave them alone," the girls will reciprocate. If a girl is reasonably bright, has two or three loyal friends who are not "real wild," an occasional interesting teacher, and a stern group of elders who insist that she cannot marry until she finishes high school, she may remain and get a diploma. On the other hand, the social difficulties that can drive her out of school are numerous. She may become involved in a feud and a knock-down-drag-out fight that will result in her being expelled. Or rivals may steal her clothing and, deprived of her feminine armament, she will leave school in a rage. Again, she may become a member of a wild, hookey playing female clique and find that she may not be able to withdraw (and settle down) even if she wishes to do so, as her friends may torment her until she goes with them. She may even leave school to get revenge on an enemy, egging on her parents to denounce her rivals to the principal.

Some minority of young people leave high school because they marry or have babies. While most of the young married folk we knew did not wish to go to high school, a number of the unmarried mothers did. Their parents, however, told us that the principal had refused them permission to return. Whatever may be the case at OCHS, the curious custom of terminating the education of unwed mothers is widespread throughout the United States. Both its wisdom and morality are open to question. One would think that on this matter (and others) policy might be made by Indian school board with some country Indian members, rather than by the principal.

The few country Indian girls who come from respected and relatively affluent families are better able to hold their own in both the social and academic levels of the high school. While they too may "run around to White Clay" and elsewhere, they can manage to dress well and meet the modest scholastic demands. By the time they are in the eleventh and twelfth grade they may belong to almost as many school activities as the town girls. If they are talented and can count on a good deal of support from their parents they will sometimes decide that they can make a better marriage off the reservation, and they will settle down to get the diploma which (they hope) will lead to a secretarial or nurses school and, eventually, a husband with a good job.

In our more extensive and thorough study of the elementary day schools on the reservation we concluded that the situation had contributed to the rise and development of day school peer groups which, in some cases, made scholastic instruction almost impossible.[38] It is interesting that something parallel to this seems to be happening in the high school. Most of the country Indian adolescents seem unable to endure high school existence without developing attachments to other students. But the aims and rules of these groups are self-defeating - if the young person really wishes to graduate from this particular high school.

How this situation can be improved without the involvement, advice, and effort of Indian parents is difficult to imagine.

FOOTNOTES

1. Murray L. Wax, Rosalie H. Wax, and Robert V. Dumont, Jr., Monograph No. 1 of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, 1964.

2. While the defects of such a judgmental rating are obvious, other techniques for adjudging the poverty of country Indians on the Pine Ridge Reservation would not necessarily have been more valid. Families have other sources of real income besides cash and, as among urban slum-dwellers who secure funds from public assistance programs, attempting to measure income and its source is regarded as a highly threatening activity. No investigator would disagree that most families in our sample were poor, and the only point which such a person might dispute is the exact margin among the three categories which we have labeled as "extremely poor," "poor," and "quite well off."

3. All manner of variables - which an outsider would find difficult to evaluate but about which Indian neighbors are very knowledgeable - go into the assessment of a family's economic status. Thus the family of a man employed at the fish hook snelling plant established on the reservation by Wright-McGill may be classed as "well off" if there are only one or two children. But if there are seven or eight children, the family will be "poor." If, in addition, the one worker supports several married children and grandchildren, the family group may be considered "really hard up." Some of the most poverty stricken folk are those where the elders are unable to work and are also relatively unskilled about approaching and manipulating the representatives of welfare agencies. This is not to say, of course, that those who do receive ADC or old age pensions do not desperately need them.

4. For a detailed discussion of the situation and attitudes of these young people see Chapter III.

5. Estimate based on a universe consisting of eighth grade graduates of Loneman Day School for June 1961, 1962, and 1963. Of the total of 47, 10 (21 per cent) did not enroll in high school.

   For the total federal schools on the Reservation, 1956-61, an average of 140 children annually completed the eighth grade while 106 enrolled in the 9th grade. Thus, during this time period, dropout was about 24 per cent.

6. See Wax, Wax, and Dumont, op. cit., pp. 98-101.

7. For a profound discussion of the emotional significance of adolescent friendships, see Edgar Z. Friedenberg, The Vanishing Adolescent, Boston: Beacon Press, 1958, pp. 50 to 69. See also Harry Stack Sullivan, The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry, New York: Norton, 1953.

8. The same may be said for the instructor who takes over a class which has once organized itself against a threatening teacher.

9. Robert V. Dumont, Jr., Oglala Community School Program, unpublished work report, 1964.

10. For a description and discussion of withdrawal in the Bureau day schools see Wax, Wax, and Dumont, op. cit., pp. 98-101. For additional examples of how the behavior of Indian students may vary in different situations see reports on the Workshop on American Indian Affairs for American Indian College Students prepared by Fred Gearing, Robert K. Thomas, Rosalie Wax, Richard K. Pope and Rolland Wright. Copies of some of these reports may be obtained from D'Arcy McNickle, c/o American Indian Development, Inc., Boulder, Colorado.

11. Many well-reared country Indians assume a bashful mien before persons in a respect category, which, of course, includes teachers. But in a courtship or joking relationship they are the opposite of bashful.

12. Rosalie H. Wax and Robert K. Thomas, "American Indians and White People," Phylon, XXII, 4 (Winter 1961), 305-317.

13. Miller and Caulkins were impressed by the silent unresponsiveness of English speaking Chippewa high school students and concluded, as we did, that in the classroom this silence is often imposed by the peer group. On the other hand, we find their ascription of a "monolithic apathy" to the young Indian misleading. Indian silence is a vivid and powerful form of communication and it almost never expresses what the White Man understands as apathy. Frank C. Miller and D. Douglas Caulkins, "Chippewa Adolescents: A Changing Generation," Human Organization, XXIII, 2 (1964), pp. 150-159.

14. Statement issued by Principal, December 14, 1963.

15. Compare similar behavior of Apache youth, as described in "Apache Parents and Vocational Choice," by Louis C. Bernardoni, Journal of American Indian Education, II, 2 (1963), pp. 1-8.

16. Statement by young man of 20 who dropped out three years before when in the ninth grade. Being a man, he now felt free to tell us what "the kids" do.

17. His family moved to Rapid City when he was a child and he learned to "talk English playing with the White kids." Later, like many relocated Sioux, his folks moved back to the reservation. He says he does not speak Lakota easily. "I forget a lot of words and I got to talk real slow."

18. It is noteworthy that the high school authorities assume that the Indian pupil has only such personal rights as the authorities give him. Country Indian entrants rarely seem to question this assumption though it may well be that they do not understand it. On the other hand, a country Indian college graduate who listened to an "orientation speech" delivered by the principal of OCHS remarked:

> "It seems like they are taking away all of the students' personal freedom and they will only give it back to him piece

> by piece - if he does his work detail he will get so much merit and this will allow him to attend maybe one show a week."

19. On this kind of escapade, Erik H. Erikson makes the following interesting remarks: "The prevalence of car thefts and motor accidents among juveniles is much decried (although it is taking the public a long time to understand that a theft is an appropriation for the sake of gainful possession), while automobiles more often than not are stolen by the young in search of a kind of automotive intoxication, which may literally run away with car and youngster. Yet, while vastly inflating a sense of motor omnipotence, the need for active locomotion often remains unfulfilled. Motion pictures especially offer the onlooker, who sits, as it were, with the engines of his emotions racing, fast and furious motion in an artificially widened visual field, interspersed with close-ups of violence and sexual possession -- and all this without making the slightest demand on intelligence, imagination, or effort. I am pointing here to a widespread imbalance in adolescent experience, because I think it explains new kinds of adolescent outbursts and points to new necessities of mastery. The danger involved is greatly balanced in that part of youth which can take active charge of technical development, manages to learn, and to identify with the ingeniousness of invention, the improvements of production and the care of machinery, and is thus offered a new and unlimited application of youthful capacities. Where youth is underprivileged in such technical experience, it must explode in riotous motion; where it is ungifted, it will feel estranged from the modern world, until technology and nontechnical intelligence have come to a certain convergence." *Youth: change and challenge*, Erik H. Erikson, ed., New York: Basic Books, 1963, pp. 10-11.

    Interesting material on this kind of peer group activity may be found in *The Urban Adjustment of the Sioux Indians in Rapid City, South Dakota*, an unpublished progress report by Robert A. White, S. J., pp. 29-31.

20. Administrators and authorities seem today to be particularly prejudiced against male peer societies over whose organization they have no control; On the other hand, most able and talented men in our society will, if encouraged, call up a great fund of youthful reminiscences which make them (as young men) sound almost as bold and mischievous as the Sioux. Readers interested in these phenomena might look at *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, by J. Huizinga, Boston: Beacon Press, 1955; *The Vanishing Adolescent*, by Edgar Z. Friedenberg, Boston: Beacon Press, 1958; *Street Corner Society:* The Structure of an Italian Slum, by William Foote Whyte, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Enlarged edition, 1955; "Cats, Kicks, and Color," by Harold Finestone, and "The Social Integration of Queers and Peers, by Albert J. Reiss, Jr., both reprinted in *The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance*, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1964.

21. See Huizing, *op. cit*.

22. This interviewer had also interviewed this second set of girls in 1963, when they were in the eighth grade. We do not have the data to explain

why most of our country Indian respondents who enrolled in the high school in 1963 are enthusiastic about it and why most who enrolled in 1962 disliked it. Older Indians from this particular district tell us that there is a growing determination among the young people to remain in high school. We also gather that certain of the policies and procedures of the high school have been changed in the past year.

23. We have been told that the high school boys fight each other a great deal, yet we have rarely had a Sioux boy or young man complain to us about such a fight or try to involve us in a feud against another boy or his family. Since our information on the young people is based largely on interviews, we cannot be sure whether the boys' relationship to each other differs significantly from the girls'. One thing, however, is clear: the male adolescents are much more reluctant to involve White people or Indian elders in their quarrels.

24. Town girls, on the other hand, gave such responses as "I'd buy a lot of Christmas presents for my family."

25. In traditional Indian custom and according to Indian etiquette, a child is competent to decide for himself such issues as whether or not he wishes to attend school. Moreover, if Indians pressure a relative to perform a task, then they become obligated to assist him (or her) in any way that is considered useful to doing the task. Thus the child whose parents pressure him to remain in school may well believe that he has a claim against them, and if they welsh on the debt he in turn is free of commitment.

26. Perhaps one might say that Sioux boys prefer to show themselves as daring and defiant whereas Sioux girls prefer to be regarded as devilish.

27. It is regrettable that the nature of our study made it impossible for any staff member to become an habitue of the taverns at White Clay. While we heard a great deal of gossip and often saw high school pupils hitch-hiking to White Clay, we know little about what actually goes on there or on the extended auto excursions that begin there. We do not even know how many of the young folk spend their own money or attach themselves to some man with a pay check to spend. A very useful investigation could be made in this unexplored area.

28. Statement made by tenth grader attending Holy Rosary Mission.

29. Older young women who have graduated from high school often seem to enjoy recalling and describing their scholastic difficulties. But they have developed quite a different perspective toward "education."

30. See Wax, Wax, and Dumont, op. cit., pp. 99-100. The young ladies from the day school sometimes carry over their presentation of physical helplessness into non-scholastic areas. Thus, on one occasion the country Indians of a particular district held a fund raising drive in which part of the entertainment was furnished by basketball games between teams of women. Slim and agile girls from the seventh and eighth grades (aged 14 to 18) played matrons (aged 30 to 45), many of

whom were anything but agile. Neither team could play well, but the older women gave all they had while the school girls limped about like sick pullets. Some older people (Indians) expressed themselves as pretty disgusted with such spiritless behavior.

31. Communication from Robert V. Dumont, Jr.

32. See James West (pseud.), *Plainville, U. S. A.*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1945, pp. 75-81, 188-189; W. Lloyd Warner and Associates, *Democracy in Jonesville*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949, pp. 193-213, 293-300; A. B. Hollingshead, *Elmtown's Youth*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1949; Edgar Z. Friedenberg, "An Ideology of School Withdrawal," *Commentary*, XXXV (1963), pp. 492-500; "The Modern High School: A Profile," *Commentary*, XXXVI (1963), pp. 373-380; "The School as a Social Environment," *College Admissions 10: The behavioral sciences and education* the proceedings of the tenth annual Colloquium on College Admissions of the College Entrance Examination Board 475 Riverside Drive, New York 27, N. Y. Published by the College Board, 1963; Howard S. Becker, "Social-Class Variations in the Teacher-Pupil Relationship," *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, XXV (1952), pp. 451-465.

33. It would be interesting to see whether this pattern of repetitive dropping out appears among other disprivileged children. Heretofore, of course, it has been associated with the "spoiled" and independent children of the upper classes.

34. It is very difficult for a person who has not lived out on the reservation in an Indian home to appreciate the difficulties of commuting to Pine Ridge for work or school. See *Formal Education in an American Indian Community*, p. 21.

35. Specifically, the young man told us that he cut the class of a teacher who had called him a dumb Indian. When the absences were reported to the high school principal, he was ordered to attend the class in question. When he protested and refused, he was put on "restrictions." Thereupon, he quit school.

36. See *Formal Education in an American Indian Community*, pp. 52-53.

37. A young man admired by his peers can be a fine athlete, reckless rowdy, and competent scholar. Being defiant seems to give him general respect among male students. We do not think that the same norms apply to girls. A girl may enhance her status with her peers by "raising cain" in class and embarrassing an unpopular teacher, but she is not admired if she "runs around" all the time especially if she monopolizes the boys or gets the friends who are trying to cover up for her into trouble. There are some interesting differences between the way the country Indian young men and women organize themselves to cope with the high school situation, but since we had no female participant observer in the high school we hesitate to speak dogmatically on these matters.

38. See *Formal Education in an American Indian Community*, pp. 90-101.

APPENDIX I

INDIAN EDUCATION FOR WHAT?*

Many Western reformers have viewed formal education as a benevolent instrument of social change and social uplift--the principal and ideal technique for developing the underdeveloped, or in the language of A. L. Kroeber (1946) and Gordon Hewes (1961) a technique whereby people may enter the civilized Ecumene. To reformers of scholarly mind, education has embodied many virtues, being peaceable, gradual, and integral with their own occupations and interests--therefore vastly to be preferred to such other modalities of entry into the Ecumene as the violent military explosions of external proletarians or "barbarians." Being themselves educators, social scientists have often found this view congenial. On the other hand, when functioning as scientists trying to discover why education fails to move some peoples into full status within the Ecumene, they have tumbled upon the fact that education does not look the same from the bottom as from the top. To the people who are to be uplifted, education as a concrete institution - a school system - bears quite a different aspect than it does when viewed abstractly from the peaks of Ecumenical leadership and scholarship. Especially when children are the primary educational targets, the school is much more than a nebulous locus where knowledge is transmitted; it is the arena of an intense social drama. The social, political, and economic cleavages and conflicts characteristic of the cross-cultural situation are reflected into the school and transform the classroom into something quite different than the reformer conceived of it as being.

In like manner, many of those who are involved in Indian affairs think of education as something good for Indians: helping to transform them into persons who are more acceptable within our national society, better qualified for employment, less prone to become charges upon social welfare agencies, and less prone to the proletarian criminality of public drunkenness and disorder, rowdiness and thievery. We would surmise that this ideology is widely prevalent in the federal schools for Indians, in the BIA generally, as well as in the national Indian interest organizations. By referring to it as an ideology, we do not intend criticism but analysis. Teachers, generally, tend to believe and to preach that education and lower-middle-class morality are the keys to a future of economic opportunity and social success. Nevertheless, for minority ethnic groups the struggle may be more devious. It is worth reminding ourselves of some of the vicissitudes of the Japanese-Americans, who were as energetically oriented toward education and achievement as it is possible to be and who were the stereotypical embodiment of the Protestant virtues of thrift, diligence, and industry. Yet, on the West Coast of the U.S., it was precisely these characteristics that were singled out by their competitors and enemies as justifying discriminatory and repressive action. "They work so hard you can't compete with them," was a complaint frequently voiced by White farmers.

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The contrast with Indian affairs may fruitfully be pushed even further. During World War II, the Japanese-Americans were confined to Relocation Centers, institutions which have been compared to concentration camps but which perhaps are better compared with the Indian Reservations of half-century ago. (The comparison is evident even from the recruitment of administrative personnel: many had been members of the Indian Service and some were to become high officials in that Service after the War.) Within some of the Relocation Centers, the Japanese-Americans did not adopt the passive posture so often bemoaned by Whites observing Indians within their reservations, but instead organized themselves to influence the conduct of the administration. The irony is that the administrators, who had been selected by circumstances to regulate the lives of these able and energetic people, thought of and justified their task as being the educational one of inducting them into Americanism and democracy and the further irony is that they perceived the inmates' attempts at organization and self-government as dangerous threats, as was perhaps inevitable given the heavy and dictatorial responsibility from the federal government (R. Wax 1953, 1950).

We do not mention the foregoing account in order to condemn the role of particular, federal, bureaucratic organizations in dealing with ethnic minorities such as Indians and Japanese-Americans, but rather to remind our audience of the accidents that affect the destiny of any such minority. Among the most significant of these accidents has been access to the ballot and sufficient local concentration to affect the election of congressmen . . . and schoolboards. Here settlement patterns have favored the ethnic Jewish and Catholic enclaves of our metropolitan areas and have worked against the rurally dispersed Japanese and Indians. Federal policies of dispersal in the urban relocating of both the latter groups have likewise limited their ability to become effective political blocs.

The foregoing prologue may serve to remind us that it is possible to overemphasize the role of education as compared to political and military power in determining either the relationship between a particular ethnic culture and the civilized Ecumene or between a particular ethnic society and the national US society. We may also be reminded that education can not be regarded as an abstract and individual activity but must be seen as a concrete social system, itself shaped by political and social forces.

Turning now more specifically to the Oglala Community High School of the Pine Ridge Reservation and to the problem of dropping out (the focus of our most recent study) we find once again that the view of the Sioux diverges very widely from the rational views of the national leaders of Indian affairs. Moreover, the motivations or forces that direct some of the young people into the high school are rarely those that would be approved by scholastic reformers.

Many officials of the B.I.A. tend to see high school dropout in terms of opposing social forces: the administrators and teachers try to attract the young people into a scholastic environment in order to prepare them for entrance into the greater national society; meanwhile, the conservative Indian elders try to pull the young people back into the empty and unprogressive reservation culture. This perspective is very like that of most other American educators who believe that the rate of high school dropout in disprivileged areas can be reduced only by drawing the young folk from their present environments and subjecting them to the stimulating and broadening influences of general American education. Once broadened and motivated, it is expected that these young people will obtain a respectable and well paid employment and eventually play a modest role in support of the more civilized levels of our national society. On the other hand, if the pull of the old environment is too strong, they will return to their odd jobs, pool halls, relief rolls, and the numbers game.

Our investigation of the Oglala Community High School indicates that this widely held--and superficially reasonable--conceptualization of the social dynamics involved in high school dropout is--for Pine Ridge, at least--oversimple and inaccurate.

It is true that the Pine Ridge administrators urge the Indian parents to send their children to the high school and that they try to keep enrolled students in the classrooms. On the other hand, very few of the country Indian adolescents go to school because of the scholastic or academic advantages it offers. (By country Indians we mean the children of the more conservative folk who live out on the reservation and send their children to the country day schools.) Most of those who enroll do so because their friends of day school years are enrolling, for to be separated from their friends is, as one of them put it, "torture." Young men have an additional reason--their passionate desire to play basketball and participate in sports. Indeed, a number of boys stated that the only thing that kept them from dropping out was their enjoyment of basketball. Young women are particularly attracted to the high school by its promise of novel and exciting social experiences (boys, dances, movies) and by the proximity of the agency town of Pine Ridge and of the taverns and juke boxes of White Clay--an off-reservation hamlet that serves as the local Babylon. (Since a considerable number of young men drop out on reaching the age of sixteen--the State age limit for compulsory attendance--it is likely that some students go to high school because their parents do not want to get into trouble with the law.) While many of these young people will tell an interviewer that they go to school "to learn" and will add that their elders have instructed them that if they don't finish high school "they will have a hard time and won't get a job," very few express interest in any scholastic achievement except "learning to talk English." This interest in learning to talk English may be related to the fact that many day school graduates, though they may have some facility in reading and writing English, have not yet learned to speak it with any fluency. Among these young people some have tried to get jobs in towns near the reservation and they had, apparently, themselves discovered the extent of their handicap.

While most of the high school teachers try to arouse the interest of their students, their success is meager. Forty-two per cent of the young people who entered high school from the district we studied intensively, dropped out in the ninth and tenth grades. (Twenty-two per cent of the young people from this district left school after completing the eighth grade.) The more conscientious teachers point out correctly that many of the day school graduates are not prepared to undertake high school work at a ninth grade level. On the other hand, our investigations indicate that relatively few students drop out of high school as a direct result of poor academic performance. Instead, long before they can appreciate how handicapped they are, more than half of the boys are propelled out of school by a head-on collision with the authorities. Many of the country Indian youths seem to define the school authorities as enemies and react toward them with the impulsive and uncalculating recklessness which, for them, is proper masculine behavior. They steal oranges or candy from the mess hall, play hookey, steal a Bureau car and ride about the country with pals until the gas gives out, go to White Clay and get drunk, or break an "$85.00 government property mirror." For these offences they are either expelled or restricted to the dormitories, that is, forbidden to attend movies, athletic events, or go to town. Many of these youths seem unable to endure sitting in class all day and in the dormitories all night and they are likely to say, as one put it: "To hell with this noise," and go home.

In contrast to the boys, most of the girls do not openly defy the authorities. Instead, they drop out of high school because they are unable to tolerate their social disadvantages. These girls seem to perceive relatively early in their school careers that the children of the Bureau Employees and other moderately well-off "Mixedbloods" (Wax, Wax, Dumont 1964; Chap. III) have far better clothes and are "away ahead of them" in matters of teen-age sophistication, scholastic achievement, fluency in the English language, and general knowledge of how to beat the system. They feel poor, dowdy, and dumb, or, as they put it: "embarrassed . . . out of place . . . like freaks." Should they attempt to play an active role in extra-curricular activities (clubs, committees and dances) they are likely to meet strong and sometimes even violent opposition from the experienced and knowledgeable young folk who have been attending the Oglala Community day and boarding schools since they were five and six years old. If they are shy, overage, and come from poor families of little influence, they will either drop out or turn much of their energy into the world of hookey playing, "running around and raising Cain." There are few who seem to use the school only as a place to eat and, occasionally, sleep. Just as many of the young people enrolled in school to be with their friends, many now drop out with their friends. "My friend said: 'If you're not going to be around then I'm the only one who'll get punished, so if you're going I might as well go too.' . . . I felt kinda sorry for him, because if he'd stay'd in there he'd of been a good basketball player."

Before proceeding we would like to emphasize that the above remarks are not intended to single out either the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the Pine Ridge country Indians for criticism. The practices and policies of most high schools attended by underprivileged urban children are probably more like those of OCHS than they are unlike. Similarly, many of the adolescents who drop out of these urban schools are probably more like the young Sioux - in passion, energy, loyalty to peers, attitudes toward the authorities, and poor elementary school preparation - than they are unlike. If there is something unhealthy in this situation, it is a widespread sickness.

To return to the topic of social dynamics. Our observations suggest that the country Indian is not so much pulled out of high school by his conservative elders as he is ejected or rejected by the authorities and by a high school social system that favors the more advantaged and more cautious students.

An additional question is raised by the fact that a small number of country Indians somehow seem able to run this gauntlet and obtain a high school diploma. A few even go to college - more this last year than ever before. How did they manage to do it?

We obtained life histories from a number of these young men and women and found that the majority had been given a great deal of social, psychological, and financial support by their extended kin group. Apparently, some country Indian families have become convinced that their corporate well being and prestige within the local community depends on getting at least some of their children through high school (and college, if possible) and thus into the better paying tribal and bureau jobs. Young Sioux who have this formidable body of elders blocking their retreat do not find it easy to leave school. As some folk put it: "All the force of his parents is behind him." In some cases, this parental and kin pressure is so strong that it puts outright dullards through college. While they are in school, these "successful" pupils do not necessarily withdraw from the boisterous and forbidden recreations of the peer groups. But they do, we suspect, tend to "shape up" to the extent that they evaluate risks and stay out of the more rash and foredoomed adventures. As one of them put it: "We do like [as] White People." Besides, should they get into serious trouble, their kin will raise a fuss with the school authorities sufficient to keep them in school. In addition to this intense familial support, four young people mention the aid and encouragement given them by a particular Indian high school teacher. Another major force keeping young men in school until graduation is proficiency in sports and especially in basketball. The few young women who graduate often hope that their diploma will lead to an off-reservation secretarial or nursing school and the opportunity to get a good husband.

Another smaller but still significant number of young Indians graduate from high school because they are alienated from their kin and from the Reservation peer groups. These are usually orphans or children who have been grossly neglected by their parents, and have managed to attach themselves to a particular teacher or to a group of boarding school peers. It is noteworthy that those of these young people to whom we talked did not seem to take much pride in their individualistic achievements. When asked how they got through school they launched into bitter and repetitive denunciations of their folks who (they said) had neglected them to drink and run around and had not helped them through school in any way. In a White student who is expected to take pride in lonely individualistic accomplishment, such behavior would appear odd and childish. But these alienated and educated young Sioux might be lamenting the fact that their accomplishment signified little because it was truly individualistic. That their parents and relatives had not helped them seemed to be a cause for shame.

Whether the young Sioux drop out or remain in high school, they seem to do this largely in their own way and according to their own or their elder's definition of the situation. In this respect they resemble many tribal or peripheral peoples who, when exposed to Ecumenical knowledge and theories of education, select what appeals to them and reformulate it in their own terms. In brief, the Sioux, in their own small way, are using education very much as did the Jews, the Cherokee, the Northmen, and, in our own day, the tribal peoples of Africa. While we participants in Western civilization tend to define education and the motive for attending school in terms of individualistic success, it may be useful to remember that most other peoples have defined and still define education in quite different terms: the religious search for divine truth, the political and nationalistic strivings to develop an indigenous elite, the identification with a revolutionary or nationalistic movement. The student seeking the Kingdom of God or the socialist or nationalist utopia will - like the young Sioux "with all his family behind him" remain in school despite repeated individualistic failures. (Conversely, the student who accepts the ideology of individual success and then like the country Sioux is subjected to repeated failures and humiliations will not remain in school very long.) However, for the Sioux to start their own educational movement, reservation culture and reservation politics would have to have a much different cast. The rise of panIndian nationalism may be predisposing toward this kind of development; it is too early to tell.

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APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTERED TO GRADUATES OF LONEMAN DAY SCHOOL

DATA SHEET II

1. NAME OF YOUNG PERSON ____________________ Age or date of birth ________

2. Does he (she) speak Indian: Well ☐; Somewhat ☐; Not at all ☐.

   Does he (she) speak English: Well ☐; Somewhat ☐; Hardly at all ☐.

   Did he (she) graduate from grade school? __________

3. Is there some woman who has been bringing up this young person?

   Yes ☐; No ☐. If Yes, what is her name? ____________________

   How is she related to young person? ____________________

   Does she have any employment for which she is paid money? Yes ☐; No ☐.

   Regularly ☐; Sometimes ☐; Never ☐; Don't know ☐.

4. Is there some man who has been bringing up this young person? Yes ☐;

   No ☐. If yes, what is his name? ____________________

   How is he related to young person? ____________________

   Does he have any employment for which he is paid money? Yes ☐; No ☐.

   Regularly ☐; Sometimes ☐; Never ☐; Don't know ☐.

   If employed, what is his job? ____________________

5. Are father and mother of young person divorced? ____________________

6. Did young person enroll in 9th grade? ____ If yes, what school?

   ______________. Is he (or she) still attending school? ______

   If not, during what grade did he (or she) drop out? __________

7. If he (or she) dropped out, what is he (or she) doing now? __________

____

There follow three different descriptions of how well off people may be. Put an X in the square you think fits the people who brought up this young person or who are now responsible for him or her.

☐ They are quite well off (like Linda ____________ folks) and can afford to help the young person with money for clothes and the other things needed for high school.

☐ They are not well off, but they can manage to help at least with some money for clothes and the things the young person needs for school.

☐ They are really having a hard time and they could hardly get any money at all to help the young person get clothes and things for school.

QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTERED TO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

DATA SHEET III

1. NAME OF YOUNG PERSON ____________________ Age or date of birth __________

2. Does he (she) speak Indian: Well ☐; Somewhat ☐; Not at all ☐.
   Does he (she) speak English: Well ☐; Somewhat ☐; Hardly at all ☐.

3. Is there some woman who has been bringing up this young person?

   Yes ☐; No ☐. If yes, what is her name? ____________________
   How is she related to young person? ____________________

   Does she have any employment for which she is paid money? Yes ☐; No ☐.
   Regularly ☐; Sometimes ☐; Never ☐; Don't know ☐.

   If employed, what is her job? ____________________

4. Is there some man who has been bringing up this young person? Yes ☐;

   ☐ No. If yes, what is his name? ____________________

   How is he related to young person? ____________________

   Does he have any employment for which he makes or is paid money? Yes ☐;

   No ☐. Regularly ☐; Sometimes ☐; Never ☐; Don't know ☐.

   If employed, what is his job? ____________________

5. Are father and mother of young person divorced? __________

6. What is young person doing now? ____________________

   ____

7. Are the parents of this young person:
   people who go to Indian dances and fairs ☐
   people who do not go to Indian dances and fairs ☐

8. Are the parents of this young person:
   people who live in the town of Pine Ridge ☐
   people who live in the country on their own land ☐
   people who live in the country in some kind of special place, an old school, church, or in a house for teachers ☐

9. Are the parents of this young person: (Underline one)

Both Indian
Both White
Mixedblood
One White - One Indian
One Mixedblood - One Fullblood

10. There follow three different descriptions of how well off people may be. Put an X in the square you think fits the people who brought up this young person or who are now responsible for him or her.

☐ They are quite well off and can afford to help the young person with money for clothes and the other things needed for high school.

☐ They are not well off, but they can manage to help at least with some money for clothes and the things the young person needs for school.

☐ They are really having a hard time and they could hardly get any money at all to help the young person get clothes and things for school.